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WIDE AWAKE

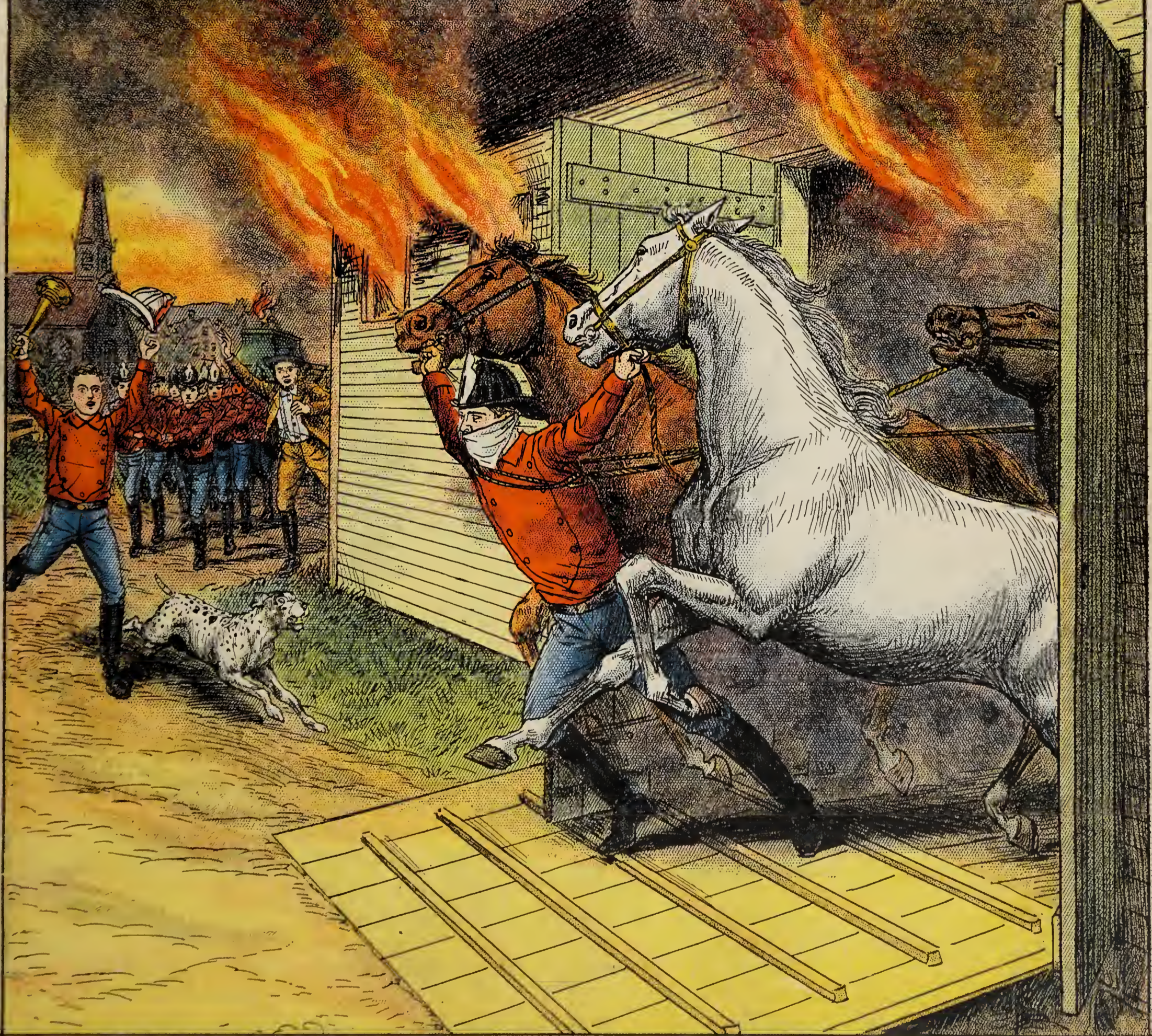
A COMPLETE
STORY

WEEKLY

EVERY
WEEK.

YOUNG WIDE AWAKE'S MASCOT — CHUM; —

OR, TERRY ROURKE'S BRAVE DEED. *By ROBERT LENNOX.*



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WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

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Young Wide Awake's Mascot Chum

OR,

TERRY ROURKE'S BRAVEST DEED

By **ROBERT LENNOX**

CHAPTER I.

TERRY, THE EVER READY!

That September afternoon Captain Fred Parsons, of Neptune 2, came down the stairs from his father's private office, and left the bank building.

Just as he stepped out on to the sidewalk he saw his former sweetheart, Kitty Lester, leave a store a few doors up the street.

As she did so Kitty, hastening toward the corner, thought she dropped her purse into a small hand-bag that she carried.

Instead, the purse fell to the street, a fact which hastening Kitty did not notice.

Fred Parsons saw the purse, and leaped eagerly forward to snatch it up.

"Oh, I say, Kit!" he called after her.

Miss Lester, who permitted but few people to address her in any such familiar fashion, halted and turned, frowning slightly.

"Did you call me, Mr. Parsons?" she inquired, rather frigidly.

"Yes," admitted Fred, hastening to her side. "I say, Kit——"

"Have you forgotten that I am Miss Lester?" she asked, coldly.

"Oh, be a bit friendly, won't you?" urged Fred, trying to throw pathos into his tone. "You used to call me Fred, and I used to call you——"

"I prefer to have you call me Miss Lester, if you must address me at all."

"Why, I—I—I had something to ask you," stammered Captain Fred, all taken aback.

"Ask it, then."

"Have you—have you missed anything?"

"Nothing human, at all events," Kitty replied, coolly.

"But haven't you missed something else? Of course you haven't missed it yet," Fred went on, awkwardly, bringing forward the hand that he had held behind him. "Here is your purse. I saw it fall to the sidewalk, and hurried to bring it to you."

"That was very kind of you," replied Kitty Lester, a trifle less stiffly. "Thank you."

She held out her hand and Fred surrendered the purse.

"Kitty, won't you let me walk along with you—at least a little way?" Fred urged, coaxingly. "I'd really like to talk with you a little while."

"I'm afraid I don't feel like sparing you the time," Kitty replied, with a little shake of her pretty head.

"Why?" he insisted.

Kitty's lovely eyes flashed with something close to anger.

"Do you mean to suggest, Mr. Parsons, that there is any reason why I should explain my preferences to you?" she asked, haughtily.

"It seems to me you don't treat me as well as you would most dogs," complained Fred, bitterly.

"Most dogs are deserving and faithful animals," replied Kitty, very coolly.

She started to walk along, but Captain Fred, who did not seem able to take a hint, turned and walked at her side.

Just at that moment a quick step sounded on the crossing, and then Young Wide Awake was before them, lifting

his hat, smiling into his sweetheart's eyes and wholly ignoring Fred.

"Oh, I'm delighted at seeing you!" Kitty exclaimed, thrusting a gloved hand under Wide's arm: "You will be able to put me aboard my car."

Neither paid the slightest heed to Fred, but started over the crossing, as a west-bound car was approaching.

"Huh!" growled Fred, tartly, and also audibly, "some folks are not as careful of their company as they really ought to be!"

There was a little flash in Kitty's eyes, but that was all the heed she paid.

Nor did Wide pay any heed, either, but continued talking to Miss Kitty until the car stopped at the crossing.

Our hero helped Miss Lester aboard, giving her hand a little squeeze that was returned.

Then, after turning and watching the speeding car a few seconds, the young captain of Washington 1 returned to the sidewalk.

Parsons had not stirred, nor had the scowl vanished from his usually sulky face.

As he neared the curb, Wide slackened his pace, looking Fred fully in the eyes as he came on.

"Parsons, it's hard to be a gentleman, isn't it?" asked Wide, coldly.

"So? You find that it is?" jeered the Neptune commander.

"I was thinking of your difficulties in that line," Wide went on coolly. "I suppose you imagine yourself a gentleman, but no person with good judgment does."

"Oh, indeed!" gasped Fred. "Look at what's trying to post me!"

"I suppose you have been brought up to the notion that the possession of money and good clothes is enough to make a gentleman out of any old material," our hero continued, carelessly. "Have you ever noticed, lately, that none of the young ladies in whose set you ought to be ever take any notice of you? It's because they don't consider you a gentleman."

"And because you have a bowing acquaintance, or a little more, with some of our young ladies, you imagine you are all right?" sneered Captain Fred.

"I believe several young ladies whom you ought to know honor me with their acquaintance," returned Wide, mildly.

"Oh, the girls around this town are not much of a lot, anyway!" uttered Fred, contemptuously.

"Careful!" ordered Wide, warningly.

"What right do you think you've got to give me instructions?" rasped his rival.

"If you say anything improper about Belmont ladies, I'll knock you down, and not let you up again until you've apologized," retorted Wide, decisively.

"Oh, you're spoiling for a fight, ain't you?" demanded Parsons.

"Not with you," our hero uttered, coolly. "I hate to soil my hands on your kind. Still, if you make it necessary, I suppose I can use soap and water and disinfectants afterwards."

That was about as insulting as Wide could make it, and he looked keenly at the other.

Our hero wanted to fight, on account of the remark di-

rected at Kitty, but he did not care to drag her name into the trouble.

Captain Fred, however, was not on the fight.

He would have delighted in pounding his rival of the Washingtons, but he felt certain that an encounter would result the other way.

So he glanced sneeringly at Wide, but made no move toward trouble.

"You think you're mighty important, don't you, Halstead?" Parsons growled, a moment later. "What gives you an idea you know so much that you can pose as a teacher to others?"

"I don't," Wide answered, simply. "I don't try to teach, but I'm willing to learn. Parsons, you're just about an outcast in this town, simply because you won't learn the ways of ordinary decency. There are very few people in Belmont who care to have anything to do with you. You've lost more friends right in your own town than most young people are ever able to make."

Fred flushed, all the more deeply, because, deep down in his soul, he knew that Captain Dick Halstead was speaking the truth.

"You're young enough to get on the right track yet, Parsons," Wide went on. "Why don't you try it, and see if people won't look upon you as something better than a well-dressed but wholly unpopular young ruffian, as at present?"

Here again was excuse enough for a fight, but Captain Fred chose to turn on his heel and walk off.

"It won't do him any good," muttered Wide. "Nothing ever will, I suppose. Think of a fellow like that inheriting a fortune and blossoming out as one of our rich men!"

"My! my! But ye're looking black about something, Oi'm thinking," cried a jovial voice as Wide passed a corner.

It was Terry Rourke, who stepped nimbly forward, linking his arm with Wide's.

Halstead told his friend of the provocation he had just had.

"I tried to make him put up or shut up," Wide continued, "but there wasn't any spirit in the fellow this afternoon. I couldn't drag Kitty's name into it very well as an excuse for hitting him, so what could I do?"

"That's an easy wan," grinned Terry, good-humoredly.

"What would you have done, Terry, old chap?"

"The lad's a banker's son, ain't he?" queried Rourke.

"He certainly is."

"And he must be knowing the slang av the banking game?"

"What, then?"

"Why didn't yez play bank wid him?"

"Bank?"

"Yes! Jist hand him a crack, and tell him that's wan on account. Thin hand him two more, and politely ask him to be afther discounting thim! Hand him a half a dozen more, an' be telling him ye'd be afther dhrawing on him for thim at thir-rtty days' sight. Thin hand him wan in the eye, and tell him that was inthrest ye had forgotten to pay. Soak him two in the rib cage, and tell him that was two off for cash. Av he needed anny more——"

"I don't believe he would, by that time," broke in Young Wide Awake, laughing.

"Thin, afther ye got through wid him, tell him ye'd

credit him wid as manny more as he'd like to draw upon yer at anny other time whin he found himself short," wound up Terry. "Thot's what Oi'd be calling playing 'bank' wid a banker's son. Thry it some time."

"I believe I will," smiled Wide. "That is, if you don't get in ahead of me."

"Not unliiss he puts it over me," promised Rourke. "Oi'm particular about the blaggards Oi associate wid, aven in the way av a fight!"

The two chums turned down Holmes Street to the fire-house, where, finding more than a dozen of the fellows present, they speedily became lost in department talk, and forgot all about the Neptune captain.

Fred, however, had not forgotten our hero. Captain Parsons, too, went to a fire-house, the Neptune's, but he did not join in the talk there.

In a corner he sulked, while thinking blackly about our hero.

"I've got to get square with that fellow, Halstead. I've got to make him feel that I'm loaded and dangerous. If I can't do it any other way, I'll hire somebody to slug him good and plenty, and tell him it's from me."

Fred shivered a bit at that idea, however.

His father, the banker, while not a man of the strictest moral ideas, nevertheless believed in standing well in the community for fear of injuring the bank's business.

"If I hired some fellow to do up Halstead, and it leaked out," growled Fred, "I suppose the gov'nor would keep his threat of packing me off out of Belmont, bag and baggage. Yet, by thunder, if I can't settle that bumptious fellow myself, I surely will hire someone else to do it for me, no matter what happens!"

These were the thoughts that Captain Fred took home with him to supper at the end of the afternoon.

Halstead, on the other hand, as he sat at the table with his mother, didn't allow any subject as disagreeable as Parsons to enter his mind.

"What are you going to do this evening, mother?" asked Wide, as he pushed his chair away from the table.

"I'm going to call on the Robinsons, Dick.

"You certainly won't want me there?"

"I'm afraid you'd find it a bit dull, my son. What are you going to do? The usual thing?"

"Yes. I guess I'll run up to the fire-house."

"I hope you won't have any alarms to-night."

"I hope the same thing, mother. Somebody always loses money when there's a fire, you know."

Terry stopped at the door, the two chums then strolling up the street.

"Now, take a look at Skip, will yez?" demanded Rourke, as the tough young janitor came out of the fire-house dressed more like a fashion plate than anything else.

Of late Ted Lester had been seeing to it that Skip was better dressed than ever.

"Whin ye see Skip turning out, looking like thim dudes in the pictures in the winder av Halloran's tailor shop," teased Terry, "thin guess where Skip's going."

"P'chee!" retorted Skip, gruffly, "seems t'me I've seen youse two fellers at dis time o' de night w'en youse didn't look just like lemons! But I s'pose w'en youse two gets on yer chawmed-t'-meet-youse rags, youse are jest going fer choir practice. Wot?"

"What's thot he's hiding behind his back wid de other hand?" chaffed Terry. "Chocolates, is it? Now, what d'yez think av thot?"

"Say, wot d'youse carry wid youse, w'en ye go to see a goil?" demanded Skip. "Peanuts? Ginger-bread? Wot?"

"Oh, 'tis going to see a gurril ye're up to?" quizzed Rourke. "Thin, me laddy, Oi'll tell yez thot whin Oi go to pay an evening call on a young lady, Oi wait until it's darruk."

"P'chee!" scoffed Skip. "Wit' a face like de one ye're wearing dis week, Terry, I don't blame youse fer being 'shamed to go in de daylight. Not!"

"Better let him get on his way, Terry," laughed Wide. "He's too much for us to-night. Trot along, Skip, and don't get a cramp in your arm from holding hands too long."

"Say, is dat one of de risks of de game?" questioned Skip, looking interested. "P'chee, I've been wanting t' ask an expert fer a long time. An' say! Wot's good fer dat kind of a cramp, if youse gets it?"

Clang! clang! ding!

"Aw, ain't dat jest like t'ings!" growled Skip, as the din of the fire-alarm smote his ear from the near-by clapper.

Then, with a snort, the little fellow dashed inside, up the stairs, and began hurriedly to get off his best clothing.

Skip was down in the engine-room again by the time that a dozen of the fellows had reported, and made a hustle for his fire togs.

"P'chee, ain't dat a shame, wot?" grumbled Skip, crossly. "I bet dat de ashes trun out on de heap is smoking, and so dey hands erlong de ding-dong fer us. Say, maybe Floss won't be mad, dough?"

Wide's voice broke in on his thoughts.

"Engine crew swing on and run her out! Get away lively, there!"

Skip's place was on the running rope of the hose carriage that followed.

In another twinkling Washington was under way at a lively pace, for the alarm came in from the north side of the town, at a considerable distance.

After the first start it was all level ground and easy running.

Terry, finding that the hose carriage crew was having no hard time of it, darted forward, ranging alongside his chum and Lieutenant Hal.

"Is it a race wid Nepchune?" inquired Terry.

"No," Wide returned. "We've got a rather shorter distance to run than Neptune, but if they get there first, all right. I'm putting the fellows through as briskly as they can go and keep their wind for work."

As they neared the location of the box they came into more open country.

Presently, when still nearly a quarter of a mile away, they saw the blaze, under where they had already located the smoke.

"It's Fairchow's barn," declared Wide. "A hot one, too. If they've got the horses out, about all we can do is to keep the fire from spreading. That barn is going to be a tinder box."

"Bedad, thin! They haven't got the hor-rses out," snorted Rourke. "Look at thim three or four people standing there, at a safe distance, doing nothing but stare at the

door. Sind Hal back to look afther me crew, Wide, and Oi'll be afther sprinting forward to show thim dubs how to get hor-rses out av a burning place!"

Not stopping to see how his proposition was received, Rourke started off down the road at the fastest sprinting clip of which he was master, and he was a good runner, too.

"Better get back to the hose crew, Hal, I guess," nodded Wide, as he set the pace faster for the last dash to the fire.

So Hal dropped back.

It was Washington's win to the fire, for Neptune 2 was not yet in sight anywhere.

It was the possible fate of the dozen or more horses of Truckman Fairchow that decided Wide upon that last swift dash.

Yet, fast as the young firemen moved with their machines, Terry, unincumbered, outstripped them thoroughly, and Wide, glancing ahead, saw Rourke pass the cautious neighbors, yank open a side door, and leap inside, closing the door after him.

"That's the ever-ready Terry!" grunted Wide, not without a thrill of alarm. "He rushed in, never pausing to think whether the maddened horses will trample the life out of him before he can have time to make the first move. Hustle, Washingtons! We're all needed there!"

Though the young firemen were panting, they put on one last spurt of extra speed and raced into the yard.

"Hurrah! There's our real mascot!" yelled Young Wide Awake, waving his helmet.

The stable doors flew open, and Terry appeared, leading a string of frantic horses at the risk of his life.

"Bully for you!" roared Young Wide Awake, as Washington 1 clattered up.

Then Terry went down, under a hurricane of kicking hoofs, the animals plunging over him in a jumble and chaos of fright.

Wide leaped forward, his heart sinking, for he feared to see his splendid chum ground to death before his eyes.

CHAPTER II.

TROUBLE HATCHES BETWEEN THE RIVALS.

Terry had fallen on his back when he went down under the horses.

It was impossible to get up among so many flying legs, so Rourke tried to roll over out of harm's way.

He all but succeeded, as the maddened brutes were trying to turn back into the stable again.

One rearing animal, however, would have planted its returning front hoofs in Terry's face had not Wide sprung forward in time to seize the brute by its halter, forcing it back.

Terry's head was just shaved by the falling hoofs.

Phil Scott yanked Terry by the legs, hauling him just out of harm's way, and the rescued one sprang to his feet.

"Get hold av th' leaders!" yelled Terry, rushing fearlessly back among the animals. "Thin the rest will have to come. There's seven av thim in th' string!"

Wide, Phil, Brad, Joe, Hal and half a dozen others had hold of the halters by which the string of seven were hitched together.

It was hard work for a few moments, but at last the

united hauling resulted in dragging the frenzied horses out into the yard.

"Run them some distance away, or they'll go back, after all our trouble," called Wide, as he and Terry hung to the leaders of the string.

Some two hundred feet from the stable the excited horses, still snorting in their fright, were driven into the next yard and the gate shut on them.

Hal, who had fallen back from the string, had organized other Washingtons and led them into the barn, with the result that the other five animals were now strung together.

Yet these last five, more frightened than the first animals, were making such a fight against being led out of the stable, that the efforts of the entire Washington company were needed to drag the brutes out.

Once they were a hundred feet from the blazing barn, however, the horses were more easily managed.

"Some of you let go, now," called Wide, dropping behind, "and come back and get the hose coupled on to the hydrant."

Not much time was lost in doing this, and a stream was speedily directed against the blazing dry wood of the old barn.

"There's no chance of saving the barn, of course," commented Wide, as he and Hal, his lieutenant, stood back to watch the work. "But look at that house over beyond."

Sparks were flying from the barn, many of them lighting on the roof of the three-story house beyond.

Then little puffs of smoke ascended, showing that the roof was catching.

"Swing the hose away from the barn. Get over into the next yard and play on that roof!" shouted Wide to Phil, who had charge at the nozzle. "Linemen, stand by to drag the hose! Axemen and bucket men, stay here to do what you can with the barn."

Leaving Hal at the barn, Wide went with the hose, for it would be a sad blunder to let the house be seriously endangered.

The first splashes of water, of course, put out the little fires that were starting on the house roof.

Wide stood back at some distance where he could watch the pitched roof of the house.

"When we can get a ladder we'll get up there and see a good deal better what we're doing," he muttered, anxiously.

The clanging of the fire chief's gong was heard now. In another instant Mr. Pelton drove up, leaping out and darting forward.

"We couldn't save much of the barn, sir," Young Wide Awake reported. "I'm watching this house."

"Quite right," nodded the chief. "Here come the Neptunes, now. I'll let them play on the barn."

He departed to give the order.

While he was gone Hook and Ladder 1 arrived.

Wide quickly had a ladder up, leading the nozzlemen himself to the roof.

"I'm glad we got here just as we did," muttered the young captain to Phil. "You see, this is worse than it looked from the ground. Souse the water on, fellows!"

Down below were the occupants of the house, all of whom had fled at the first warning.

Satisfied with the way the start of a bigger blaze was

being attended to, Halstead swung off on the ladder and reached the ground.

The barn had caved in and lay a blazing pile of ruins that was gradually being extinguished by the water the Neptunes were pouring on.

As Wide reached the fence between, and leaned over to talk with Hal, who had called off the Washingtons when the Neptunes took the barn blaze in hand, a buggy containing two excited people arrived as fast as a galloping horse could pull it.

The buggy contained Mr. Fairchow and his wife, who had been away until now.

"Where are my horses?" screamed Fairchow, leaping to the ground.

"You'll find them all corralled in that yard over yonder," said Wide, pointing.

"All of them?" insisted Fairchow, his face ashen-gray with anxiety.

"Twelve of them," Wide answered.

"That's the full number I had in the barn," Fairchow answered, looking more cheerful. "Who got them out?"

"The firemen."

"Your crew, or the Neptunes?"

"Some of the Washingtons," Wide answered. "It was Rourke, principally, though several of the fellows gave him useful help."

"I suppose I might have known it wouldn't be the Neptunes," flashed Fairchow.

Captain Fred heard, flushing dark with anger.

"I don't care about the old barn, or the feed that was there," Fairchow went on, excitedly, "but I'm mighty thankful about the horses. That string of animals is worth twenty-five hundred dollars. Where's Rourke? I must thank him."

"There he is, leaning against the hose carriage," nodded Young Wide Awake.

Fairchow ran over, seizing Terry's hand and wringing it.

"Shure, somwan must have been filling yez up about me having anny more t' do wid it than annywan else," Terry smilingly answered.

"It was your captain who told me," retorted Fairchow. "He said it was principally your work."

"Now, Oi'll not be saying a word against me captain," responded Terry. "He's a good wan, but sometimes he leaves his spectacles at home be mistake. Oi had no more t' do wid yure horses than annywan else. Shure, we're all one comp'ny, and pull together."

Fairchow next went over to look at his corralled horses, counting them, and finding all accounted for.

"Nothing more doing up here," Phil shouted, through his hands, "and no more sparks coming this way."

"Better stay there and watch till the all-out sounds," Wide answered.

"Some folks make me tired," grumbled Captain Fred as Big George came up.

He was talking loudly enough for Wide and some of the other Washingtons to overhear him.

"I've noticed that," said Big George, dryly. "What's up now?"

"Do you notice the kind of work we've got to do here?" Fred went on.

"Yes; we're putting out a fire. That's what we're here for, ain't it, Fred?"

"Yes; we're set to squirting on a lot of old timbers, after the grand stand players have made their spectacular play. They leave us the work, then, and go over and play the hose on where there's no fire. It's the same with all grandstanders—they never do anything but the picturesque part."

"Oh, shut up!" rumbled Big George, and walked away. Two or three of the Washingtons snickered.

Though Fred did not turn to look at them, he flushed painfully and strolled away from the fence.

After the all-out sounded, Captain Fred went by Wide and Terry, as the latter were walking over to the Washington machines.

"Huh!" sneered the Neptune captain, glancing at both with pretended contempt.

"Now, what ails the little willy-boy?" queried Rourke of his chum.

"Why, I suppose," smiled Wide, "he's looking for trouble and afraid of what might happen if he found it."

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN FRED GETS HIS CHANCE.

Back at the fire-house Skip worked a lightning-change act from fire togs to holiday garb.

This time, on account of speed, he dressed with somewhat less care.

Then, hiding his box of chocolates under his coat, he slipped through the crowd.

A few minutes later he was slipping along another street toward the apartment house in which Flossie Elwell dwelt with her parents.

Skip had hurried, and was warm, which may have helped to make him a bit cross.

At all events he gave a disagreeable start when, on looking ahead, he saw Flossie, nattily gowned and wearing a becoming big hat, step out from the house and off up the street.

"Hold on, dere, Floss!" he called, in a low voice, but it reached her, and caused her to wheel about.

Perhaps there was too much of the ring of authority in his tone to suit the little lady.

At all events, after a look at Skip, she turned, walked on again, though more slowly.

"Say, p'chee," demanded Skip, indignantly, as he overtook her, "wot sorter way is dis to tell me de time?"

"What are you talking about, Skip?" asked Flossie, as they walked together.

"I passes de hail after youse, and——"

"Do I have to stop when you call to me?" asked Flossie, smiling, though there was something of a flash in her eyes.

"Well, p'chee," flared Skip, "it's de only decent way to use a feller w'en he mails a holler to youse?"

"Decent?" asked Floss, a little tartly.

"Yes, decent; dat's wot I handed out," asserted Skip, standing stubbornly by his guns.

"What do you know about being decent?" insisted Flossie, with another aggravating smile.

"Say!" exploded the tough janitor of Washington 1.

He stopped dead short, but Flossie, without even a pause, kept on with a toss of her head.

So Skip, after an angry snort, caught up with her again.

"Say, wot's dis headin' fer—a scrap? Are youse tryin' t' make me play rough house wit' a dry goods?"

"I wish you'd talk so people could understand you," exclaimed little Miss Elwell, impatiently.

"Are youse tryin' to make me eater lemon?" Skip insisted, his look becoming more challenging and defiant.

"I'm not trying to make you do anything," Flossie assured him, with a tantalizing laugh. "In fact, I can't guess what you're trying to do."

"Didn't youse know I was coming to see youse to-night, Floss?"

"I heard you say you were."

"Well?"

"You didn't come, though."

"P'chee, I came as soon as de fire'd let me."

"But I didn't say I'd stay at home all evening in case there should be a fire," Flossie retorted.

"Oh, youse didn't, eh? Maybe youse didn't. But, p'chee, I didn't expect t' see youse heading off up de pike."

"I can't help what you expected," Flossie retorted, impatiently. "Mamma was going to visit her cousin Emma to-night, and I was going to invite you to go along with us. But I waited as long as I thought best, and now I'm on my way to join mamma."

"Oh, dat's it, is it? Goin' ter tote me 'round among strangers? Goin' t' take me erlong as Skip, de living lemon, wot? Goin' t' hand me out to yer mother's relashuns as de human joke, wot? Youse t'ink I'm de kinder gazooka dat'll put on me photograft smile an' make happy faces at er roomful o' old wimmen dat yer mudder visits—is dat it? Ye dopes it out under yer hat dat youse can rent me out fer de evenin' ter any old crowd o' guys dat youse wants? Wot?" demanded Skip, unreasonably.

Flossie, from being tantalizing, became indignant.

"Skip, don't you dare to speak in that disrespectful way of my mother's relatives! We are calling there this evening, and I was going to invite you to go with us, if you had seen fit to behave decently."

"Wot? Me go dere?" lowered Skip. "Not!"

"No; I think you'll do much better, and enjoy yourself more, in less select company," said Flossie, very decidedly.

"Here's a box of chocolates I brought erlong, Floss," said Skip, artfully, as he held up the box to view. "I t'ink dey're pretty good ones, too, but I see dey ain't going to be needed, so——"

Bending over at the curb, he slipped the package in through a sewer opening and let the chocolates fall from sight.

Flossie gave a little gasp, which she tried to stifle from Skip's notice.

To her mind it was the wickedest kind of a waste, for, next to ice cream, she was fonder of chocolates than of anything else.

"Good-night, Skip," she uttered, in a strained voice, then walked rapidly away.

"Maybe she loins dat two can talk an' act funny, an' maybe she don't. Wot?" mused the little fellow as he stood still, watching Flossie turn the next corner.

"Dat goil is just like all de odders," decided Skip, wrathfully. "Hand her all de good t'ings in life, an' never pass it on dat youse have gotter mind o' yer own, and wot does

she do? Wot? Walks on yer collar! Makes a sidewalk of yer, an' passes it on t' yer dat youse ain't in it wit' de doit in de street! Oh, jes' let any goil find out dat ye t'inks she's de real candy babe, an' den she plays youse t' get de flag dropped on youse at de quarter! Sometimes I t'ought Floss was diffrent. Not! Any one o' dem's a eighth of a yard outer de same old forty-yard piece o' calico. Wot? Don't I know? Ain't I got eyes dat can take a peep? Goils? P'chee!"

It took Skip some time to emit all this thought, and still more time to persuade himself that his view was right.

By the time that he came to be a little less sure that he was right, Flossie Elwell had been out of sight for some moments, and he didn't even know where her mother's despised cousin lived.

Had Skip been a little better judge of human nature he would have hurried right along, and would have come soon upon Flossie, who, for the distance of two blocks, sauntered very slowly.

But Skip did not know and did not go after her, and after those two blocks had been covered, Flossie, with a righteously indignant remembrance of what had happened to the chocolates, tossed her head and walked on rapidly.

Her evening was spoiled, and it was not very much her fault, either.

It was Skip, however, who was the downright wretched one, for it did not take him long to realize, after all, that he had made a very thorough idiot of himself.

"An' I was right on de foolish job, too!" he confessed to himself. "Got in wit' bot' crazy feet, an' gathered up all de green lemons on de vine, too!"

In this uncomfortable frame of mind he encountered Wide.

"Hullo, little one!" hailed the latter one. "Say, Skip, cheer up! You look as if you had fallen down and broken your heart. What's up?"

"Nottin'," returned Skip, briefly.

"What's down, then?" insisted the young fire captain.

"Nottin'."

"What's doing, then?"

"Nottin' at all."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" cried Wide, smiling. "Went out to make your call, and found there was nothing doing? Poor little chap!"

That ready sympathy opened up Skip's nature.

He looked upon Wide as his best friend, outside of Ted, anyway, and, besides, Wide must know a whole lot more about girls than Ted did, seeing that young Lester didn't like girls anyway.

So Skip let enough out of the bag to set Wide fully on the track.

"Go on and tell me the whole of it," begged Wide, laying a hand on his young friend's shoulder.

Now, Skip, though he had led a waif's life, and a hard one at that, until he had fallen in with the fire company, had been among decent young fellows long enough to understand the beauties of telling the straight truth.

So, as nearly as he could remember it, he told just what had passed between little Miss Elwell and himself.

"You called after her rather sharply to stop, didn't you?" inquired Wide.

"I s'pose so."

"No girl likes that, Skip. You know how you'd feel if anyone tried to stop you with a dog-whistle. When you found out that Flossie didn't like being stopped in that way, you should have excused yourself. That would have smoothed it all over."

"But it struck me," complained Skip, "dat she trun out dat chesty feelin' too strong to look good t' me."

"I don't exactly blame her," said Wide, judicially. "Now, as to what you did, do you want to know what I think about it?"

"Yep—please."

"Skip, it seems to me that you acted like a little jackass all through."

"Maybe I did, p'chee," Skip admitted, humbly. "But, say, Wide, de eggs is broke, now."

"Oh, I don't know about that."

"Wide, dat goil must be so mad dat she wudn't pass me not even a glass er sour lemonade."

"Oh, when Flossie sees you're sorry about it all, she'll soon get friendly again."

"D'youse really t'ink so?"

"Yes, if you make your apologies in the right way, and don't get another foolish streak on while you're doing it."

"But I can't see her t' night, anyway," complained Skip.

"I don't know jest w'ere dat relashun of her mother lives, an' I'd get de t'row-down dead an' sure if Floss foun' me hangin' around her own door. Wot?"

"No; I wouldn't be waiting at Flossie's own door," Wide advised. "But I can tell you where that cousin lives."

Wide gave him the street and number.

"P'chee!" shivered Skip, "I hates ter skate in among strangers t' make me meek face. Dat don't look good, neider."

"Why, see here, you penitent little chump," laughed Wide, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I happen to know Flossie's relatives. I know them quite well, in fact. If you want me to, I'd just as soon call there. I can get a chance to talk to Flossie on the side. It'll be easier for me to make the start, too, as Miss Flossie doesn't happen to be mad with me. So, if you want, little one, I'll slip up there now and make your peace for you."

"Say, will youse?" demanded Skip, with a burst of gratitude.

"Just what I'll do," clicked Wide. "No; never mind the thanks. I'm glad to do that much for any friend of mine. But, see here, Skip, I shall tell Flossie that you're going to call at ten o'clock to escort herself and her mother home."

"P'chee, but I'll be dere. Wot!"

"See that you are, then, Skip. I'm pretty sure I can make your peace for you, but you've got to help yourself out by being there right on the minute."

"Lay yer whole wad on my bein' dere!"

"Then, if I don't see you again, Skip, you make a point of being there just the same, for I'll be sure to have it all fixed for you."

"Say, Wide, but youse are a good feller," cried Skip, with feeling.

"See that you are, after this," laughed Wide. "Don't go making a fool of yourself again at the first chance."

"Wot? Me?" grunted Skip. "Don't youse lose anyting worryin' bout me!"

"Good-night, Skip."

"Good-night—an' t'ank youse a t'ousand times. Dat's straight!"

"Poor little Skip! He isn't the only fellow who has acted that way, and then had to get corrected chest measurements afterwards," smiled Wide, as he walked along on his new and delicate errand. "It's a good thing that Flossie is good-natured and kind-hearted, or I might be having my walk for nothing."

Our hero's course took him up on the south side of the city.

As he passed under a street lamp near a vacant lot he was espied by another young fireman.

That fireman happened to be Captain Fred Parsons.

"I don't believe he has seen me," quavered the Neptune commander. "Oh, if I could only get him here!"

Fred had just time to dodge behind a bill-board that stood at the edge of the sidewalk.

Unsuspectingly, Young Wide Awake strolled by.

Just as our hero had passed, Fred, crouching on his knees behind the further end of the bill-board, reached out and caught one of Halstead's ankles.

Trip! Wide went down, striking on his forehead, and lay there stunned.

"Now, confound you, I've got you, if I can be quick enough about it!" gloated Parsons.

Seizing our hero by the shoulders, Parsons dragged him into the vacant lot, well away from the gaze of passers-by.

The moon not being up yet, Fred hardly feared interruption on that quiet side street.

"Now, let's see what I can do at tying hands!" uttered the gloating young wretch.

Whipping out a cord, and rolling Wide over flat on his face, Parsons tied his rival's hands behind his back, and tied them with a savage tightness of twist and knot.

Then he rolled Wide over on to his back, and sat down beside him.

Then, after a while, Wide began to sigh and mutter a bit.

At last he opened his eyes.

A cruel light gleamed in Captain Fred's eyes as he bent over the face of the fellow he hated.

"Now, Halstead," he gritted, "you'll find the tables turned, I guess—turned rather heavily."

Wide looked up into the dark face of his rival, and understood.

"What have you got to say now, you sneak?" jeered Captain Fred.

There was no answer from Wide.

"Can't talk, eh?" sneered Captain Parsons. "Oh, I'll make you talk and holler, too! Beg, confound you, if you want to save yourself from being made a wreck of!"

Still Wide remained silent, but the look of contempt in his steady eyes was eloquent.

"Take your medicine, then!" gloated Fred, fiendishly.

Then his fists descended on Young Wide Awake's face, giving our hero a fearful beating.

CHAPTER IV.

A COWARD'S WORK.

A dozen brutal blows Fred rained down ere he paused.

Then he stopped in sheer astonishment.

Young Wide Awake had given forth not a sound.

Blood was streaming from the young fire captain's nose. One eye looked decidedly "raw."

Wide's under lip had been cut by a fierce blow from Fred's fist.

"How do you like it as far as you've gone?" jeered Fred, thickly.

Wide's only reply was another look of contempt, the effect of which was rather spoiled by the damaged look of his face.

"Let me know when you get enough, then," taunted Captain Parsons, with an affectation of light-heartedness over his wicked work.

An affectation, we say, for even one with as dulled a sense of fair-play as the captain of the Neptunes possessed, could not help having some glimmering of how cowardly his deed was.

Instead of striking at once, Parsons began to pull his rival's hair and twist his ears.

"This doesn't hurt any, I hope," taunted the wretch.

If it did, Young Wide Awake didn't propose to say so.

He showed an amazing amount of sheer fortitude under all the torment, but he was resolved that he would die sooner than show the white feather to such an enemy.

"Oh, I know how you'd like to get at me, right now," exulted Captain Fred. "You can take it out in wishing, though. After I've got through with you to-night, you'll know better than ever to get fresh with me again. You'll understand that I'm too dangerous to be trifled with again, I reckon!"

Now, by way of change, he took to prodding and thumping his rival in the ribs.

It was surprising how many different ways he could find of inflicting torment.

"This is almost worth the suffering," gritted Wide under his breath. "It shows me how absolutely vile, how utterly wanting in manhood this fellow can be and is!"

He was determined not, by any sign, action or word, to let his enemy have any satisfaction that could be prevented.

"Oh, how mighty meek you are!" growled Fred. "You don't look at all like the hoodlum who sometimes gets so much fun out of pounding me. I suppose you're thinking of what you'll try to do to me some other time."

Wide remained silent.

"Is that what you're thinking of?" demanded Fred, after landing a stinging slap across one of his victim's ears.

Wide closed his eyes, after sickening of the view of the other's distorted face.

"Because, if that's what you're thinking of," taunted Captain Fred. "you'll do well to forget it. If you ever speak to me again, or try to hit me, what you're going to get to-night won't be a marker to what you'll get next time. As for to-night, I'm going to do you up as well as I know how. See if I don't!"

Still, nothing but that provoking silence.

Fred busied himself with devising a few new torments.

Once in a while the flesh shrank from the infliction, yet Halstead did not once cry out.

Secretly Wide was listening, as best he could, for any sound of a passing footstep on the sidewalk.

If he heard that, he would call out for help and quickly end this orgy of brutality.

As to shouting out, in the hope that somebody in a nearby house would hear and come to the rescue, Wide did not think the idea promising.

If he yelled on that plan, Parsons, with two well-aimed blows, could knock him out and then scurry away ere any assistance came.

"If I do yell, it will be to some purpose," Young Wide Awake told himself, with his teeth hard set.

"Oh! So you're going to show how game you are!" sneered Captain Fred. "We'll see, then, for now you're in for a real thumping. The other was only for practice."

Kneeling on his rival's chest, Captain Fred rained down the most savage blows of which he was capable.

Wide gasped, closed his eyes and was silent, but Captain Fred kept on until his fury had spent itself and left him weak.

"Now, I guess I've polished him off pretty well," muttered Parsons. "He's knocked out, too. I don't believe he's shamming a bit."

He knelt, placing his ear over Young Wide Awake's heart.

Then his face took on a sickly green hue of awful fear.

"Say, I haven't killed the sneak, have I?" he palpitated. "I didn't want to do that, confound him!"

Wide's face was certainly white, save where the blood from his nose smeared it.

But Fred, after listening for some time in a fright, heard a heart-beat.

"Oh, he'll pull out all right," muttered Parsons. "Small loss if he didn't—but I wouldn't want to be the one to send him out of this life. Ugh! It wouldn't be pleasant to find the cops after me!"

Afraid to leave until he was sure, Captain Fred crouched and remained at the side of his rival.

Within a few moments Wide was breathing regularly, even if not very strongly.

"He's going to come out of it all right, and after this I guess he'll know better how to treat me. I don't believe I'll have any more trouble with him," growled the sneak.

Then, after listening for sounds in the street, Captain Fred, after one last look at the rival captain, rose and hurried tremblingly away.

Wide still lay there, his eyes closed. He was not dead, but had been completely knocked out, and restoration to his senses unaided would come about slowly.

Fred had forgotten to remove the cords from the rival captain's wrists.

Had he thought, Parsons would have done this, but he was too startled, too anxious to make sure of his own safety from detection.

The errand undertaken on behalf of Skip had not been fulfilled, nor was there any chance that it would be.

Wholly ignorant of this fact, however, Skip was careful to present himself, just at the stroke of ten, at the house where Flossie was visiting.

Skip was on the other side of the street, in fact, and about to cross, when he saw the door open.

Out came Flossie and her mother, and, horror of horrors! Bud Messner, the mascot of the Neptunes, was with them!

Bud was gotten up, too, in the very best style that his wardrobe allowed.

Skip swallowed hard, then ducked back in the shadow of the tree that he was nearest.

Very proud and happy, indeed, did Master Bud look!

As they came down the steps and reached the sidewalk, Flossie slipped her arm through Bud's.

That elated mascot walked between Flossie and her mother.

"Say," gasped Skip to himself, "wot d'youse t'ink of dat? Ain't dat de whole sawdust pie?"

"Did you have a pleasant time, Bud?" Flossie inquired.

"Yep. Betcher life," the delighted young swain responded.

"Skip didn't want to come," pursued Flossie, as though she could not get over her surprise.

"Aw, him? Skip ain't wise!" declared Bud, with the air of one who knew. "He's a mutt—a fake cheese—dat's all."

"Oh, is it?" queried Skip, vengefully, from his place of concealment. "Just youse wait, Mister Bud, till I has er chance t' converse wit' yer face. Den we'll see if youse dopes it dat youse are all de real candy in de store!"

"I was a bit surprised at Skip," Flossie's mother broke in.

"I ain't," Bud contended, stoutly. "He's a——"

Skip leaned forward from his place of concealment, anxious to catch that word and save it up against his rival.

But the trio had passed just out of hearing and the voices were indistinct.

"Say, wot I wants ter know," uttered Skip, a blank look on his face, "is how did Bud manage to deal himself outer de pack? Wot? How?"

In truth, there was not very much of a puzzle in Bud's presence with Mrs. Elwell and Flossie.

That young lady, smarting under the sting of Skip's overbearing conduct, had encountered Bud just before arriving at the house at which she was to call.

Bud was dressed in his best, and hugely delighted at finding Flossie alone.

As little Miss Elwell had just a notion that Skip might call later in the evening, she invited Bud to go along with her, which that young mascot of the Neptunes was only too happy to do.

Of these facts, however, Skip was wholly ignorant.

He remained beside his tree for a few moments in a daze.

Not until he was sure that his rival and the Elwells were well out of the way did the disgruntled youngster venture from the shadow that had concealed him.

"Blame a goil, anyhow," sighed Skip. "De more ye gits t' t'inking 'bout de rocky t'ings dey does, de more dey keeps youse guessing!"

Skip strolled slowly along after that, doing some hard and not very happy thinking.

It was all still in this part of the little city. Skip walked the next quarter of a mile very slowly.

Then, as he passed a vacant lot, he thought he heard something stirring over in the grass in the darkness beyond.

"It's a cat, mos' likely," decided Skip, not without a desire to shy a stone at the animal.

Then, as he glanced, it struck him that his keen little eyes made out something strangely like a human form kneeling.

"Hey, wot's doin' in dere?" he called.

"Is that you Skip?" called back a voice.

The voice was not strong, but it electrified Skip.

"Hully smoke!" he almost roared. "It's Wide!"

"Come here, please," requested his captain.

Skip dashed over into the lot, his eyes bulging with wonder.

"Say," he gasped, "wot on eart' passed youse, Wide?"

"Help me to my feet, please," requested the young fire captain, in a low voice. "That's it; thank you. Now, untie the cords at my wrists."

Skip did better than that. With his pocket-knife he slashed the cords to short bits.

"But, p'chee! How did youse come to be out in de cy-clone?"

Wide smiled, grimly, his smile looking unusually strange from the battered condition of his face.

"Wot came down de road?" persisted Skip. "Hully smoke, youse looks like de peach crop in a blight!"

"Oh, this was just a little personal matter, Skip," Wide replied, in a voice decidedly unlike his usual tones. "We won't say any more about it just now, if you please."

"Can youse walk? Can youse make de legs move?" inquired Skip, alive with deep concern.

"Oh, yes; I'll get home all right," Wide nodded. "You can go along with me, if you like. And say, Skip, I'm mighty sorry, but something happened that prevented me from going to see Flossie."

"Oh, her? P'chee! She ain't de goods wit' me, jest now. Not w'en I gotter frien' dat looks like youse do. Never mind t'inkin' 'bout Floss Elwell."

"Did you see her?" insisted Wide, too thoughtful of others to let his own battered condition stand in the way of an interest in Skip's own troubles.

"No use t' try ter hook it outer me," retorted Skip. "I ain't goin' ter pass a woid 'bout Floss 'til I see youse wit' a diffrent lookin' piece er cake fer a face. Not!"

Wide, therefore, forebore to press the matter.

By back streets they reached the fire-house, which fortunately was locked for the night.

Getting inside, they went to the sink after Skip had lighted one of the big lamps.

Here, by means of much water, Wide removed as many of the traces of his brutal punishment as he could.

"When I get to my room I've got some arnica and witch hazel that will help matters a good deal," he smiled steadily.

"Hadn't I better run down an' get dem now?" proposed Skip, anxiously.

"And let my mother hear what has happened? Not on your life, little one!"

So Wide remained where he was, until sure that his mother must have turned in for the night.

Then he stole stealthily into the house, gained his room, attended to his injuries as best he could and dropped into bed.

Of course, Mrs. Halstead had to find out the next morning, but by that time the shock was less than it would have been at night.

Mrs. Halstead helped to attend to her son's swollen features, prepared some breakfast, and then went to her office, after first making Wide promise that he would keep indoors.

"Don't worry about my going out, mother," he laughed. "I'm not anxious to show myself in this shape. Besides, I

want to lie low, and find out whether someone is openly bragging about doing me up."

"I don't understand why you're so opposed to telling me who did it," protested Mrs. Halstead.

Terry was the only one our hero told.

Rourke, missing him from the High School, came over at the forenoon recess.

"Oh, the blaggard!" cried Terry, thickly. "Shure, 'tis a mane enough job, had he done it fairly. But t' sneak on yez and put that kind av a face on yez whin ye were helpless—well, hiven help Par-rsons, for Oi won't!"

"Don't you do anything, Terry," begged Wide. "Leave this to me. I'll soon be able to take care of the job."

Rourke did not reply, but clenched his fists, and his usually sunny blue eyes looked cold and had an ugly glint in them.

It was given out that Wide wasn't feeling very well, and that he didn't want any company, either.

In the afternoon, however, Terry let Joe Darrell enough into the secret so that Joe, provided with things from the back shop of his father's drug-store, came around and painted out the discoloration under one of the young fire captain's eyes.

There were a few other artistic touches that Joe was able to put on, too, so that Wide's face, while still swollen, did not look quite as badly as it had looked.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Joe, as he worked.

"Thinking how many jobs we've given the druggists through the Neptune crowd."

"Yes," retorted Joe, "and dad never gets even a glimpse at that trade, either. The Neptunes wouldn't go near his store."

"Oi'm thinking the druggist thim Nepchunes pathronize wud be doin' well to lay in his paints be the barrel, av he on'y knew it," growled Terry.

Though the other Washingtons, at what they understood to be Wide's request, kept away, our hero was not by any means dull for lack of company.

For Terry promptly sent word by 'phone to Miss Kitty Lester, and that young lady and Faith Vane came promptly down to the Halstead cottage.

They saw Wide, and the condition of his face, even after Joe had done his best, but they asked no questions.

Terry, however, took the reins in his own hands, and told them the whole story after Joe had gone.

"What a thorough beat Fred Parsons is!" cried Kitty, her cheeks white with the anger and disgust she felt. "And yet the fellow seems to have the presumption to hope that, some day, our doors will be opened to him again."

"I'd like to thrash the young brute myself!" cried Faith Vane, her eyes blazing.

"Ye can do it be substichoot, me dear," suggested Terry, grimly.

Faith smiled encouragingly.

Ordinarily Miss Vane was much opposed to fighting.

Now, however, when she looked at Terry's friend, Faith's deepest regret was that she was not able to administer punishment herself.

Through the next night the swelling in Wide's face went down a good deal, thanks to many and soothing applications.

The next morning he did not look so badly, after all,

and Joe, on an afternoon visit, was able to "put a good face on Halstead, and on matters, too," as he expressed it.

When Joe was through our hero took a look at himself in the glass.

"Shure, there do be no need av stayin' in the house now, unless ye want to," Terry hinted.

"Oh, I'm not going to stay in the house any longer. I'm on duty for fires or school, after this. So Parsons, as far as you can hear, hasn't been making any brags?" asked the young fire captain.

"Nary wan," rumbled Terry. "Shure, he'll better be denying than bragging on a job like thot. He'll be afther denying soon enough, niver yez fear!"

Wide was out and about town that afternoon.

His friends knew that he had met with some kind of mishap or trouble, but only those most intimate with him had any idea, founded on information, as to what the trouble had been.

Others who looked at him closely could see the painted-out signs of the battering, though, after all, the young fire captain, thanks to Joe, did not present a very "tough" appearance.

As for Terry Rourke, however, his fists clenched every time that he looked at his chum.

There was trouble brewing somewhere close at hand for someone!

CHAPTER V.

BOB GETS BUSY.

One of the Neptunes who hated our hero thoroughly was Gerald Keating.

He was one of those soft, dudish-looking boys who, nevertheless, can fight when they have to.

Keating had been in several encounters between the two companies, and had received several good poundings.

The remembrance of those hammerings rankled, and Keating, though he did not say much about it, longed to see the Washingtons, Wide and Terry, especially, made to suffer.

Gerald and Bob Fullerton got to talking about it at the Neptune fire-house.

"Something has been happening to that fellow Halstead," remarked Bob, thoughtfully.

"Sure!" responded Keating, cheerfully.

"Hear anything about it?"

"Nothing definite, though I know that Halstead got a good pounding from someone."

"I wish I knew who did it," went on Fullerton.

"So do I," glowed Keating.

"Why?"

"I'd reward the fellow with a ten-dollar bill."

"Got one?"

"Of course I have."

Keating displayed a neat-looking little wad of bills. His father being wealthy, and Gerald the only son, Keating often had more money than was really good for him.

"I've been getting a little money from the gov'nor this week," confided Bob, displaying a few banknotes of small denominations. "You know, my gov'nor had to pay a big fine on account of some trouble I got into through the Halstead gang, and he kept me on a dollar a week for a long

white, but now the old man is friendly again, and is handing out better. This week he has done about the right thing by me."

"Hm!" mused Keating, curiously. "Now that you're having real spending money again, I suppose things will begin to happen to the Washingtons."

"I'd toss away all I've got for a good dig at the Washingtons that would really hurt some of them—Halstead especially," replied Bob.

"I'd spend a bit that way myself," rejoined Keating. "That is, if it was some job that would turn out real and not be a hoodoo. You know, Bob, some of your jokes have proved sort of boomerangs that have come back and hit your own crowd on the head."

"Some of my jobs against Washington have turned out badly, but why? Because others haven't stuck to my original plan, but have thrown in frills of their own, and those frills have spoiled the jobs. Now, you can see through that, Gerald, as well as I can."

"I suppose that's so," assented Keating. "Parsons wants to boss anything that he goes into. He rules or ruins anything he's connected with, and so——"

"I see you're getting wise to the truth," approved Fullerton. "Yes, Fred Parsons has spoiled some of the best things I've ever gotten up, and I'm looked upon as a hoodoo jobster——"

"Hoodoo lobster," teased Keating.

"No, jobster," snapped Bob, looking a bit angry. "But I'm through with letting Parsons get any wind of what I'm up to."

"Thinking up something new?" asked Keating, curiously.

"Oh, yes, maybe."

"What?"

"I guess I'll keep it to myself this time," Bob returned, slyly. "Then, if it goes wrong, I'll know who's to blame."

"You might let me in, though," rejoined Keating, rather reproachfully. "I believe I've got a reputation for keeping my mouth shut, and not trying to run everything in sight, either."

"Oh, you're all right, Gerald," Bob admitted, graciously.

"Then are you going to give me a whisper about the scheme?"

"I'd better not," sighed Bob, "though it's a dandy, sure. Still, if anything went wrong, I'd be blamed for getting you into trouble."

"Don't my shoulders look broad enough to carry all my own trouble?" insisted Keating, resentfully.

"Oh, yes."

"Then tell me."

Bob still hesitated, but, at last, he began to spring his scheme.

As he expanded the outline of his joke, or job, or whatever he considered it, Keating's eyes began to snap with mirth.

"Say, Bob," declared Keating, at last, "you're not treated right in this company. Hoodoo? Why, you're a genius!"

"Thanks," said Bob, modestly, though his chest expanded a bit.

"But are you sure Mrs. Halstead still owns that land?"

"Why, we can find out easily enough," Bob rejoined.

"How?"

"Simplest thing in the world. Just telephone to the tax assessor of Mayville, and ask whether Mrs. Halstead still holds the title to that bit of land."

"Oh, sure, that's easy," assented Keating. "Of course, you don't have to give any name—or, at least, not your right name."

"Of course not," Bob replied. "Besides, don't you see, any inquiries of any kind, in Mayville, about that land, will only start the ball rolling?"

"Sure enough!" chuckled Gerald.

"Do you want to go into this thing with me, then?"

"Do I?" echoed Keating. "Bob, I'll share all the cost with you, dollar for dollar."

"Oh, the cost isn't going to be so big, either," Bob replied. "My cousin won't charge us anything for his share in the job. He's as big a joker as I am," Fullerton explained, modestly.

"Come on, then, and we'll get this thing started!" proposed Keating, leaping up.

"Now, see here, Gerald, you won't give a whisper of this away?"

"Not a breath!" promised the other solemnly.

"And if anything should turn up to whack us——"

"Nonsense! There isn't any come-back possible in this," declared Keating, with an air of strong conviction. "Why, if we use even ordinary care, nobody could even trace it back to us."

"Oh, after the thing has worked all right, I don't care if it is traced back to us," declared Bob. "In fact, then we can let it leak out, and people will know whether I'm a hoodoo jobster, or——"

"Or hoodoo lobster," laughed Keating.

"Oh, let it go at that, if you want to," agreed Bob Fullerton, rather cheerfully.

Keating and Bob Fullerton were together rather closely the remainder of that day, and also on the next.

There were no fires that day, and nothing of any especial interest happened, so far as the young firemen were concerned.

On Wide's second day out and about he looked about the same as usual, partly thanks to the natural subsiding of his injuries, and partly thanks to Joe's art.

He did not make any effort to find Fred Parsons.

The matter of paying that young scoundrel back could wait until the best opportunity came.

When Wide was thoroughly in earnest about anything, he did not believe in spoiling it all by undue haste.

On the evening of that second day a well-dressed young stranger looked in at the engine-house and called out our hero.

The stranger was Bob Fullerton's joking cousin, but, as he lived a good many miles from Belmont, and our hero had never seen him, Wide had no suspicions of anything brewing.

"My name's Furnald," lied Bob's cousin. "I want to see you on a little matter of business."

"All right," nodded the young fire captain.

"Shall we walk down toward your home?"

"Will the business take us long?"

"It doesn't need to."

"I'll be back in a few minutes, Terry," Wide called into the fire-house.

Then he turned to the stranger, saying:

"I'm quite at your service now, Mr. Furnald."

The latter made a few remarks about the weather, about Belmont being an attractive little city, etc., but did not seem inclined to broach any business on the street.

So Wide took him to the house, and into the parlor, offering the caller a seat as he struck a light.

"Now, I shall be glad to listen to your business, Mr. Furnald," suggested our hero.

"Oh, it's only a trifling matter, after all," said Furnald. "I have been up Mayville way, and I saw a little bit of land there that I was told was owned by your mother."

"Oh, yes," nodded Wide. "I believe she has a little plot up there. Farm land, without buildings; about ten acres of it."

"Precisely," nodded Furnald. "Now, it struck me that I could make some use of that land. I liked the location of it, and it occurred to me that I could build a simple bungalow there, and run up for two or three days at a time in the summer. But of course you would not want a high price for land in a little farming community like that."

"I can't say much about it," our hero replied. "You see, it was a bit of land that my father happened to own at the time of his death, and so it came to mother."

"Is it held at a high figure?"

"Not very, I imagine. The taxes amount to only a little over a dollar a year, so mother has always paid the taxes. But I guess that was mainly because she never had much of a chance to get rid of the land."

"You are very candid about it," murmured the caller.

"Why not?" asked Wide. "I believe in being frank in all matters of business. However, as to the price, you will have to see my mother. It's her property, Mr. Furnald."

"Still, she relies on your advice quite a bit, I doubt not," smiled the caller.

"She doesn't need to," Wide answered. "My mother is a very capable business woman."

"Well, see here," said Furnald, rising, "I'll call again. But ask your mother, please, to decide whether she will sell that parcel of land for two hundred dollars? That is my offer—two hundred dollars, cash."

"I haven't anything to say about it, but I think she will," answered our hero, promptly.

To the best of his own information the stranger was offering just about twice what the land was worth.

"You might call on my mother at her office, to-morrow morning," Wide suggested.

"If I can't I'll drop around here to-morrow evening," Furnald replied. "You might ask your mother, so that, if I am not able to see her, you can let me know. Remember, two hundred dollars for that land is my one and best offer."

"I don't believe there'll be any difficulty about your getting the land," said Wide.

As our hero happened to turn so that he looked into a mirror, he saw the face of Furnald reflected there.

In the caller's eyes was something that looked much like a gleam of delight and triumph.

Wide quickly turned, so that he could look directly into his caller's eyes, but the look had fled.

Wide saw his caller to the door, politely wishing him good evening.

Later in the night Young Wide Awake saw his mother and told him of the offer.

"To be sure I'll sell at that price," cried Mrs. Halstead. "My dear boy, I would have accepted had your Mr. Furnald offered me only half of that price."

Then Wide told her of the look he had seen in Furnald's eyes, adding:

"Mother, we never go to Mayville, and it has struck me that something we don't know anything about may be going on at Mayville that may make the land worth much more."

"That is possible, too," mused Mrs. Halstead.

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to have Terry and me run up there to-morrow evening? We may find out something that will show you why you shouldn't accept two hundred dollars."

"That's true, too," nodded Mrs. Halstead. "After all, this Mr. Furnald doesn't look like a very careful or close buyer in offering twice as much as the land is assessed at, unless he knows something about the value of the land that we don't know. Yes, by all means, I think it will be well for you to go up to Mayville."

"Then I'll run back and tell Terry, for he's waiting at the engine-house for the word. If Furnald should call upon you at your office to-morrow——"

"I think I shall know how to hold him over for twenty-four hours, or until to-morrow evening, anyway. You will have been to Mayville by to-morrow night."

So Wide saw his chum, and the trip of inquiry was arranged for the following forenoon.

Hardly had Wide and Terry agreed upon it when the sharp jingle of the telephone bell came in the fire-house.

"Someone wants you, Wide," reported Ted Lester.

"Hullo," came a voice over the 'phone. "Is that Captain Halstead? All right. Never mind who I am. I merely want to give you a quiet tip. Your mother may be asked to sell some land up at Mayville. All I've got to say is that, if she gets an offer for the land, she wants to look into the subject thoroughly before selling. That's all. Who am I? Lord, I wouldn't dare tell you! But I like to see poor folks get a square deal—that's all. Now, good-bye!"

Wide hung up the receiver, but there was a queer light in his eyes as he did so.

Turning, and leading Rourke from the fire-house, he told him of the message that had just been received.

"Shure, ye'll look into the whole business," nodded Terry.

They talked it over with our hero's mother, too, and she was more than ever anxious to have the pair make the trip of inquiry the next morning.

Somehow, the mystery of the matter kept Young Wide Awake up a good part of the night. He was trying to puzzle it all out.

Bob Fullerton would have been hugely delighted had he known how well his latest job was taking root.

At last, some time after midnight, Young Wide Awake dozed off.

He had slept a little while, when——

Clang! zing! ding! That nuisance to the volunteer fireman, an alarm in the small hours of the night, was coming in.

Like a flash Young Wide Awake was out of bed and hastily dressing.

Speeding down the stairs, while still yawning, he was the first to reach the fire-house.

Enough others were quickly there, however, and the running bell of Washington 1 jangled fast on the night air as the gallant young crew rushed their machine over the pavement.

The distance being about the same to the box from either fire-house, the Washingtons were bent on putting up a swift race against their rivals.

As far as that went they could have spared themselves somewhat, for, when the Washingtons reached the scene of the fire, the Neptunes were not yet in sight.

It was an apartment house fire, with not much smoke coming out at the front, though over the top of this four-story building a cloud of smoke rolled.

It was coming up, mainly, by the airshaft between the two halves of the building.

When the fire laddies reached there two policemen had already organized the rescue work.

Men, women and children were hurrying down the fire escapes to the sidewalk.

"Everybody out?" asked Young Wide Awake, rushing up ahead of his company.

"Everybody out?" repeated a policeman, to a huddled group of scantily-clad tenants.

"I—I think so," hesitated one man.

Through the street door rushed a man in shirt and trousers, barefooted and hatless.

"Get in there, you firemen, if you can!" he gasped. "Had to leave my family behind and scoot for it. Don't know whether my family can get out or not."

Wide gave the cowardly head of a family one swiftly flashing look of contempt.

Then, swinging the red fire department lantern that he carried, Wide dashed into the house just as his company came up.

The fleeing man had pointed to the side of the apartment house in which his family dwelt.

Wide darted into that ground-floor flat, finding the parlor rather thick with smoke, which was not getting out on account of the closed windows.

Then into a room back of the parlor he sped.

Here he came upon crackling flames, while a roar of fire beyond showed him that it raged more fiercely beyond.

At the next door Wide hurled himself, opened it and dashed in.

Just in time his lantern showed him the prostrate figure of a girl of sixteen, clad only in skirt and dressing sack.

She had fallen unconscious on the floor, and, but for the light of his lantern, Young Wide Awake would have trodden on her.

"There must be others in the next room," he quavered, as he dashed onward.

As he opened the door of the next room a stifled cry reached his ears even before his eyes saw anything.

A little girl, coughing and strangling in here, where the smoke was thickest, crouched over a bed on which lay a woman, scantily dressed.

"Mamma!" wailed the little one. "Come, wake up. Hurry and get out of here! It's awful!"

"Right you are, little sweetheart!" called Wide, as he

bent over, lifting the senseless form of the strangled woman.

"Come, you follow me out of here, and run fast with me."

The woman was heavy, and, as Wide turned with her in that stifling atmosphere, he felt a thrill of awful alarm.

His own lungs were fast filling with smoke, but worst of all his head was swimming, his body swaying, under weight and smoke together.

The smoke got into his eyes, too, until they streamed, for the smoke here was as thick as ever he had faced.

With a groan Wide staggered against the wall, still holding up the unconscious woman.

"Where's the way out?" moaned the little girl, groping at his knees.

She, too, was turned around, though it was her own home.

Wide tried to stifle back the groan of despair that rose to his lips.

His head was giving out so fast that he feared for the worst.

By dropping his burden and stopping to think only of himself he might yet escape in safety.

"I'd sooner die here than do that!" he told himself, angrily, as the thought came to him. "It's all of us to safety, or none of us!"

With the terrorized child clinging to him, he groped blindly for the way out, groaning inwardly when he realized that he could not find it.

CHAPTER VI.

TERRY'S BRAVEST DEED.

For some moments Wide groped about, his eyes no longer of any service to him in that thick smoke.

His soul was fast filling with despair.

Once or twice he was tempted to leave these imperiled ones briefly, in order that he might be sure of sending rescue to them.

Yet he dreaded to do it, for fear that he might only fall unconscious ere he could get the word to his comrades.

The little girl had ceased to cry out.

She clung to him, trembling, but with a clutch that was growing weaker.

Crash! smash! Then Terry Rourke's robust voice cried out:

"Annywan here?"

"Right here!" cried Wide, joyously, throwing all his strength into that one shout.

In another second Terry had leaped into the room from the air-shaft, striding through the smoke, holding a lantern before him until he reached his all but stifled chum.

"Here's the cap'n himself," cried Terry. "Take the little girrul, Phil, while Oi get the mother out. Be quick, now! Brad, help Wide himself!"

"There's a young lady in the next room. Get her," Wide ordered, feebly.

Brad dashed away on this new undertaking.

Phil, in the meantime, was running lightly up to the floor above by means of a ladder in the air-shaft.

The truck had arrived, and Terry, hearing that Wide was in the building, but not knowing where, ordered a ladder to the second floor.

Up this ladder three of the young firemen had run.

They had dragged the ladder in after then, lowering it through the air-shaft.

Wide now stood by the opened window, for Terry had gone up ahead with the woman.

Now Brad appeared, bearing the girl.

"Haven't you gone up?" demanded Brad, in protest.

"Waiting until you get the young lady up," Wide responded.

Brad uttered an impatient cry, then leaped through with his own burden.

After Brad had gone up our hero managed to reach the ladder.

He climbed but weakly, though, for here in the air-shaft the smoke was fearfully thick.

Then his head reeled, his eyes closed, and he would have fallen had not a voice roared in his ear:

"Arrah, now, me bucko lad, what is it ye're doing?"

Terry half-pushed his chum to the window above, where other hands hauled Wide inside.

Across the floor they raced him, and Phil and Brad held on to him as they helped him down the ladder.

Wide's head had given out quicker than usual on account of the weakness left over from his wicked thumping at the hands of Fred Parsons.

Down in the air, however, Wide quickly recovered.

Hal, in the meantime, had forced the hose in on the ground floor, while Neptune 2, now on the scene, was ordered to send its stream up the ladder and through the second story flat to play down the air-shaft.

The mother and her two offsprings had been carried beyond the fire lines for treatment by physicians.

All three were eventually brought out from their bad condition, though not one of them could have lived had rescue been delayed for three or four minutes longer.

Terry was now heading the axe and pike squad, in alongside of Washington's stream.

Wide would have followed, but Fire Chief Pelton caught him by the arm.

"Out in the open air for you, Captain Halstead. If Washington can't handle the fire without you, you'll be in all the better shape for ten minutes more in good air."

At the end of those ten minutes, Chief Pelton, who had carefully inspected progress on both floors, decided that, though the fire was going to be a stubborn one, it could be mastered in the end.

Captain Fred Parsons, finding Wide outside, and ashamed or afraid to meet him, went inside with his company on the second floor, for once keeping well to the front with his nozzle and axemen.

"You can take things easy to-night, captain," announced Chief Pelton. "You're not in the best of shape, and you're too good a man, when you are in trim, to take any chances with yourself now."

So Wide took up his post by the pumping crew, sending Foreman Joe Darrell inside to help.

The all-out came at last, after nearly an hour of stern, hard fire-fighting.

The man whose family had been saved from death, at no thanks to himself, did not appear to express his thanks, which hardly surprised our hero, for a fellow so cowardly at one time was not likely to have his wits at another.

As both companies were reeling in hose after the fire,

Terry Rourke deserted his crew for a few instants when he caught sight of Fred Parsons not far away.

"Par-rsons, ye're a thafe, a scoundhrel and a coward!" hissed Rourke in the ear of the Neptune captain.

"What's that?" flared Fred.

"Ye hear-rd what Oi said, ye thafe," retorted Terry, his eyes flashing. "Oi haven't called yez wor-rse names because Oi can't think av anny thot ar-re bad enough to fit yez. Get ready for throuble, though, ye scoundhrel av a thafe, for it's coming to yez. Whin it comes, ye'll be regrettin' ye didn't lave Belmont before it came. Thot's all Oi have to say to yez, now, ye cowardly thafe!"

Terry strode back to his crew, leaving Captain Fred with a scared, white face, for there had been in Terry's eyes a look that seldom comes to eyes except when deadly work is being planned.

"Oh, that talkative Mick wouldn't dare to try to kill me," Fred muttered to himself, reassuringly.

No fear of that, either, for Terry, with all his fighting grit and temper, didn't believe in killing as a way of settling grudges.

All that Terry ached for was a fair, unhampered fight, to the extreme limit that fisticuffs can be carried—and he was bound to have it.

"Washington 1 can pull out now!" yelled Chief Pelton.

"The chief always keeps us last," grumbled Captain Fred, to himself, not stopping to think that Neptune 2, also, was generally last to appear on the scene.

As Wide's company drew away with its machines, Terry caught at our hero's arm.

"There's no need av hurry, now, Wide," he muttered, "so we may as well take it easy on the sidewalk. There's enough av the lads to trundle the tub an' th' wather wagon."

Young Wide Awake, on the return, soon found that he was not anxious about a pace that would keep up with that of the company.

So he and Terry, still by chance, carrying their fire axes, fell somewhat to the rear on the trudge down Main Street.

So it happened that the Washingtons had disappeared around the corner into Holmes Street, ere our two friends got down as far as the bank.

At the corner before Wide stopped suddenly.

"I thought I heard some kind of a noise in the alley back of the bank," he hinted.

"Maybe ye did," Terry agreed.

"If there's anything wrong around there, it might be at the bank."

"'Tis aisy settled," suggested Terry. "We'll tur-rn down this way an' go through the alley."

"Hurry, then," urged Wide. "If anything is wrong, it will be well to find it out soon."

As they turned into the alley, and got close to the bank, Wide saw a human head thrust out through the back door of the bank.

"It looks wrong to see that door open at all at this hour of the night," ejaculated Young Wide Awake, darting ahead and gripping the helve of his fire axe.

He was slightly in advance of Terry as he neared the back door.

A low whistle rang out, and then:

"Hustle, lads!" called a voice. "Meddlers coming!"

There was no time to draw back.

A big man with a heavy fist led the rush through the bank's back door.

He struck at Wide, felling him and knocking him unconscious.

As he did so, Terry leaped forward brandishing his fire axe.

Four safe blowers dashed past Rourke, menacing him with revolvers.

Then Terry, swift as a flash, stationed himself in that doorway, directly over the unconscious body of Young Wide Awake.

"Hold on, men!" gasped the leader of these safe-blowers. "It's only a pair of kid firemen, and one of them is done for! We'll finish the other and get what we came after!"

"Will yez, though?" taunted Terry Rourke, as he swung his fire axe aloft and stood faithful guard over Wide's body. "Nobody gets through here or touches me friend while Oi'm alive!"

"Oh, we'll make short work of you," laughed the leader of the gang, leveling his revolver at young Rourke.

CHAPTER VII.

VISIONS OF WEALTH FLOAT BEFORE WIDE'S EYES.

"Will yez, now?" tantalized Terry. "Oi'm thinking ye'll be grabbing but a slim chance at the best, av ye make yure get-away this minute!"

"Stand aside, there," proposed the leader, "and we won't hurt you; we'll leave you bound and gagged—that's all."

"Wud thot be all, now?" demanded Terry, ironically. "Ye wudn't be tapping me on the head, or annything loike thot?"

"No, no; honest we wudn't."

"D'yez know, now," mocked Terry, "Oi wudn't be thrusting the wurrud ave the loikes av yez!"

"Stand aside, now, or you'll get killed, younker," growled the leader of the safe blowers. "We're not the kind of men to stop at anything!"

"Ye're stopping now, Oi mind," mocked Terry.

"We're going to kill you in another quarter minute, though, if you don't stand out of our way!"

"That's inthresting, av thrué," mused Terry, jeeringly.

He could not doubt that the men before him were thoroughly desperate.

Neither did he make much doubt that, if he tamely surrendered to them, they would all but kill him anyway.

More than all, Rourke was worried about the fate of his chum, who still lay unconscious at his feet.

These scoundrels might even attempt to knock Wide on the head to make doubly sure of his continued silence.

Probably these men would do that very thing, and the thought made Terry wildly mad, bringing all the Irish in him to the surface.

"Divvle the stip do Oi stir!" he defied them, resolutely.

"Then we shoot you," warned the leader of the gang.

Terry found himself confronted by the muzzles of four revolvers, steadily held.

"Shoot away, thin," he challenged, "and bring the police down upon yez!"

"See here, young man, understand clearly that we'll shoot, even at the risk of bringing a regiment of soldiers here," growled the leader. "What do we care for a couple

of policemen? It won't be the first time that we've shot cops down and made our get-away."

"So be it, thin," retorted Terry, with a pretense of carelessness. "Shoot, and thin get away, av yez can. But ye don't get by me while Oi've the stringth to swing this axe!"

An instant later, Terry, positive that the rascals did intend to shoot, raised his voice in a hoarse, mighty shout:

"Here, behind the bank! Thaves are thrying to loot the safe!"

"You infernal idiot!" snarled the leader, taking aim at Terry's heart.

He did not pull the trigger, though, for, from the street, came a loud answering shout:

"Wash! Wash! Washington 1!"

"Hurroo!" yelled Terry. "Now shoot, ye omadhauns! Shoot, and hang be daylight!"

With muttered curses the safe-blowers had leaped away from Terry, going cautiously through the alley to the head of it.

Here they came upon a dozen of the young Washingtons, led by Hal and Joe.

"Get back there, you young fools! You'll eat lead if you don't," snarled the leader of the safe-blowers.

"Let thim go, av they'll go peaceably," called Terry. "But av they shoot, close in and hack thim to pieces, and Oi'll be helping yez from the rear!"

The young Washingtons discreetly fell back.

They were firemen, and not to be expected to capture criminals at the risk of losing half of their number.

As the crooks fled down the street, however, the young firemen raised a racketty din to arouse all that part of the city.

Terry, in the meantime, was bending over Wide, whose eyes had just opened.

"They didn't get yez so hard, afther all, me lad!" exulted Terry. "Shure Oi didn't believe they had killed yez wid wan tap like thot."

Leaving Ned Parkins and Alf Ryder to direct policemen and citizens after the safe-blowers, Hal and Joe led the rest of the squad down to the bank's back door.

Here Terry Rourke entertained them with a lively account of what had happened.

"We missed you two," said Hal, quietly. "Our dread was that you might have been ambushed by Neptunes. So we grabbed axes and started out. We were running up Main Street when we heard that siren voice of yours, Terry."

"See if they got anything out of the bank," urged Young Wide Awake, rather faintly.

With fire lanterns they went in through the rear passage.

They found the counting-room of the bank with the front shades drawn down—a sign almost sure to attract suspicion with some policemen, and almost equally certain not to be noticed by other officers.

The shades must have been down when the Washingtons dragged their machines by, yet not one of them now remembered to have noted the fact.

The great steel door of the bank's safe now lay on the floor, blown from its fastenings by a charge of nitroglycerin, the noise having been muffled by the many blankets wound around the safe.

On the floor lay tools just where the cracksmen had left them when alarmed.

One of the inner doors of the safe had been all but pried off, showing the corners of thick piles of bank notes.

"Jist in time," clicked Terry, who was supporting Wide by the shoulders.

Chief of Police Sharp, aroused from his sleep at the station-house, now came hustling in.

It was not long ere many curious ones crowded into the bank's counting-room, while, outside, were several score of men whom the police would not admit.

Just in time, as Terry had said, had the enterprise of the cracksmen been nipped in the bud.

Had they been allowed five minutes more, without interruption, the robbers would have gotten away with everything of value in the big vault.

Wide and Terry, going outside, presently, discovered what had probably caused the sound that had brought the alarm to their ears.

In the breeze a broken shutter on the floor above had crashed into the window-glass, breaking it.

"That broken shutter was the silent watchman of the bank," declared Chief Sharp, drily. "That doesn't take anything from your performance, either, boys."

As soon as he could get there, after being called by 'phone, Fred's father, the president of the bank, arrived, in great excitement.

"There was eighty thousand dollars in the safe when we closed yesterday afternoon—a very unusual amount for us to have," said the banker. "The cracksmen must have had some way of learning what a rich haul there was here for them."

When the banker heard how the robbery had been frustrated, he wheeled, holding out a hand each to Wide and Terry.

"You're two of the quickest and grittiest youngsters I ever knew," he cried. "Everyone else in Belmont knows the same thing about you, though, for that matter. My thanks to you both, and to all the rest of you young Washingtons who saved the bank from being looted of the most cash it ever held!"

Mr. Parsons's gratitude, in fact, seemed to know no bounds.

He was still thanking the youngsters when other officials of the bank arrived.

Now the money and securities were taken from the vault and counted.

It was announced, however, ere the count was over, that the bank had certainly suffered no loss.

As soon as they could the sleepy, even if excited young Washingtons, drew out, attended to their machines, and then scattered for bed.

At the bank a guard of employes and policemen was established, to watch the shattered vault until morning, when the money and papers could be removed to some safer place until the big vault could be repaired or replaced.

Terry insisted on going home with Wide, and on staying with him through the balance of the night.

The blow that had felled Wide had left a lump on his scalp, though, being a plain knock-out, the effects of that attack were likely to be remedied by a few hours of sleep.

Terry left a note for Mrs. Halstead, who did not disturb the young fireman early in the morning.

Later in the forenoon the pair, feeling considerably rested, came downstairs, where they found all preparations for a breakfast laid out.

"And this," suggested Terry, "is the day whin we take thot run up to Mayville. Shure, Wide, Oi'm thinking the thrip, av ye take it aisy, will be the best way ye can be putting in the day."

"It may be the most profitable way," smiled Wide, who now would have scorned to admit that he did not feel as "husky" as usual.

Mayville was on the line of the railroad, some thirty miles west of Belmont.

It was a quiet, dull little farming town, having only some three hundred inhabitants.

"Shure, the feller must be fond av quiet, who'd want a place here," uttered Terry, who, himself, always preferred excitement.

Wide, who had been there some years before, remembered where his mother's land lay.

"Suppose we go up and have a look at the land first," suggested Wide. "After that we can make some inquiries."

A stroll of half a mile, over a stretch of dusty road, brought them to the land in question, which was not very near any house.

"There's a brook that crosses the land, and a spring that I remember," said Wide, as they drew near. "We'll try to find that spring and wash some of the dust out of our throats."

Just as they reached the brook a look of surprise flashed across Wide's face.

"Look at that water, Terry," Wide cried, looking down at the brook.

The surface of the water was mottled in many colors.

"Oil!" said Terry.

The two chums looked at each other rather queerly.

"Come up the stream a bit, Terry," begged our hero.

For at least a hundred and fifty yards along the brook its surface was mottled with floating oil.

Then, at a pool deeper than the average of the brook, the appearance of oil ceased.

"Was that what our friend wanted this land for?" murmured Wide.

"Bedad, it looks thot way!"

"Oil!"

"But did it come from the ground?" asked Terry, practically.

"I wish I had something to scoop some of the oil up in," muttered Wide.

"Thin av ye'll sit down and wait a bit, ye'll soon be havin' yure wish," uttered Rourke.

He darted off to the road, while our hero seated himself beside the brook, gazing down at the mottlings of oil.

Presently he rose, walking across the next parcel of land above this.

Though he strolled for some distance, he espied no more oil on the water.

"Here ye are, lad!" shouted Terry from lower down, brandishing a bottle that he had gotten at the nearest farmhouse.

Wide ran toward him.

Terry was already on his knees beside the brook, trying to float into the bottle as much of the oil as he could, and as little of the water.

This done, he held the bottle to his nose, taking a long sniff, then passing the bottle to his chum.

"Oil," said Wide. "Crude petroleum."

"Oil. Crude petroleum," agreed Rourke.

Then again the two chums glanced queerly at each other.

"No wondher thot Furnald chap wud pay twice as much for the land as the tax assessor said 'twas wor-rth," uttered Terry.

"My boy," said Wide, pointing down at the brook, "we see wealth floating by us!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FEVER GROWS.

"Wide," pronounced Terry, looking down at the mottled water, "yure mother'll be a rich man, Oi'm thinking."

"Hardly that, old fellow," smiled back his chum, eagerly.

"But she may be the next thing to it—a rich woman."

"And Oi've something else Oi've not been telling yez,"

Terry went on. "The woman who lint me the loan av the bottle was afther telling me that a man has been thrying to get prices on other bits av land around here."

"I wonder if it was Furnald?" pondered Wide.

"Thot Oi didn't take the time to ask her. But it makes little diffrunce, me bucko. Shure, av there do be oil springs on this land, it makes little diffrunce who may be wanting to buy the land."

Both of the chums were greatly excited.

It was well known that there was oil in the State, and two or three good-paying wells had already been tapped in another part of the State.

Now, did there seem to be any reason to doubt that Mrs. Halstead was in the way of wealth that would enable her to close her busy little typewriting office?

The two chums threw themselves down on the ground to think it over.

"Now, if that fellow Furnald is out trying to buy up this land," decided Wide, "he isn't doing it on pure guess-work. He's probably an oil expert, or else a real estate buyer working for an expert. If any expert decides that there's oil here——"

"Shure, it don't need no expert to show thot there do be oil before our eyes," retorted Terry, half scornfully, as he pointed to the mottled water and held up the ill-smelling bottle.

"Well, then, oil in paying quantities, I should say," Wide corrected himself. "If there's oil enough on this land to make an expert want it, then it seems to me that my mother would be very foolish to sell the land at any ordinary price."

"Don't worry about yure mother selling cheap," protested Terry.

If Bob Fullerton could have been on hand, and could have heard, he would have snickered hard.

"No, I guess I needn't be alarmed about her selling—at least, not for less than a fair-sized fortune in cash," Wide agreed, with another smile. "Whee! Won't mother jump, though, when she hears the news."

"There's somewan in th' road looking up this way," announced Terry.

A middle-aged farmer who had halted, leaning over the fence, now stepped into the lot.

"Morning," he greeted. "Sizing up the land, eh?"

"Oh, taking a look at it," Wide drawled.

"Thinking of buying?" asked the farmer, curiously, as he joined them.

"Don't have to," Wide smiled. "My mother owns this land."

"Oh! Then I reckon she's a mighty lucky woman," replied the farmer.

"Why?"

"Can't you use your eyes, young man? Ain't that oil down there on the water?"

"We were just wondering if it wasn't," smiled Wide.

"Wondering, eh? 'Course it's oil, young man," snorted the farmer. "If ye don't think it is, then ask yer mother to hurry up and agree to let me have this land at a thousand dollars."

"Would you pay that for it?" asked Wide.

"Would I? Say, hurry up and bring your mother along, won't ye? Or maybe you're empowered to act for her?"

"No," said Wide, "I'm not. So you'd give a thousand dollars for this ten acres of land?"

"In a minute!"

"And the fellow who came to see us offered only two hundred!" uttered our hero, innocently.

"Fellow? What did he look like?"

Wide gave a good description of Furnald.

"That's him!" cried the farmer. "That's the very chap! He was around making quiet offers for land yesterday morning, and said he'd wait twenty-four hours for a decision. But Si Allen happened to cross this land before any of the folks had sold, and then the cat was out of the bag! Oil, I tell ye, young man, and Mayville's going to be one of the big oil centres of the country. A reg'lar producing section."

"Has any oil been seen on the water elsewhere?" Wide queried.

"Yep; down there," said the farmer, pointing.

"That's all on lower ground," said Wide. "Probably the oil flowed along on the water from this land."

"Figgering out that the only oil is on yer mother's land, are ye?" demanded the farmer, in some exasperation. "Think ye've got the only oil proposition around, do ye? Don't fool yerself, young man. When oil shows up in a section, it's pumped outer more'n one ten-acre lot thereabouts. Why, day before yistidday I'd a-sold my farm at two thousand, and cheered at the chance. To-day I wouldn't touch twenty thousand dollars for my place!"

"Found anny oil on yure place?" queried Rourke.

"No signs on the surface. But the oil will be found underneath, I bet ye, when we bore for it!"

"What do the other people around here think about it?" asked Young Wide Awake.

"Since ye own this land," went on the farmer, "I don't mind telling ye that the people have plumb got the oil fever. They're keeping quiet about it, though, to see what'll happen. But let that Furnald chap come back to-day, and he'll find that one ordinary bank don't hold money enough to buy out the land hereabouts."

Wide and Terry plied their eager informant with questions.

They soon satisfied themselves that oil had appeared, directly, only on the land belonging to our hero's mother.

That seemed to make it certain that gushers of oil would be struck here as soon as boring was started.

"Maybe five thousand barrels a day from this lot; maybe more," said the rustic, solemnly.

"It looks like a pretty good thing," Wide assented.

He was cool on the surface, and trying hard to keep down the excitement that was raging inside. "I hope the indications are not fooling anyone."

"Pooh! In two months there won't be nothing around here but a railroad spur, wells, tanks and machinery!" predicted the farmer.

"Jove, I hope you're right!" glowed Wide. "Mother can stand being fairly wealthy for a change."

Rourke's eyes were gleaming, too.

There was not a thought of envy of his lucky friend.

Terry was wholly delighted that such good fortune had come to his own dear old chum.

"I'll be hoping ye're not to leave Belmont, though," whispered Terry, struck by a new idea.

"What need to?" asked Wide.

"And ye'll not be dhropping the Washingtons?"

"Of course not.

Terry was satisfied on that score, and once more wholly delighted.

"Well, we can't do much of anything here," said Wide, rising. "We may as well go home and report what we've seen."

Their new acquaintance, the farmer, walked along with them.

At the railroad station they found they had nearly an hour to wait.

Land-holders in Mayville, however, turned up.

The air was thick with excited oil talk.

When it once gets started on a good foundation the oil fever is much more severe than the gold fever.

Getting out gold may offer many hardships and difficulties, and the cost of the ore may prove to be larger than the worth of the gold.

With a good oil flow, on the contrary, the owner of the land has but to let others come in and do the work, the landowner taking a share of the value of all the oil obtained.

Wide's head got in such a whirl from all the knowing, eager oil talk about him that he was wonderfully glad when he heard the train coming.

"Well, we'll see ye back soon, neighbor, I make no doubt," called one big citizen, as the young firemen stepped toward their car.

A hearty cheer went up as the two young men boarded the train, causing many of the passengers to thrust their heads out.

One Belmont man on the train observed to his seat companion:

"That's Young Wide Awake and Terry Rourke, the great team of our fire department. But what have they been doing up here, I wonder, to kick up so much excitement?"

Once arrived in Belmont, Wide and Terry made quick tracks for Mrs. Halstead's office.

There all three discussed the news, and took many looks—and sniffs—at the bottle containing the crude oil scooped up from the surface of the brook.

"We shall be able to give Mr. Furnald our answer, won't we, Dick, dear?" smiled his mother.

At that moment the office door opened, and Furnald himself entered.

He took one swift glance at the bottle, then observed, with a dry smile:

"I take it for granted that my offer for your land, Mrs. Halstead, is going to be refused."

"It is," nodded Mrs. Halstead.

"Then, with your permission, Mrs. Halstead, it's time to begin to talk real business," hinted Furnald.

"What kind of business?" inquired Wide's mother.

"Why, of course, I hardly hope to get the land, now, for the two hundred that I offered. Still, bear in mind that the indications on your land may all turn out disappointingly. I have to keep that in mind, too, in making you a new offer of five hundred dollars for your ten acres at Mayville."

"Humph!" ejaculated Wide. "The first offer I had to-day was a thousand dollars. Before I left Mayville the price had risen to five thousand dollars. I doubt if my mother would listen to several times that amount."

"Then I fear there is no use in my remaining," sighed "Mr. Furnald," rising. "At least, I am not at liberty to offer anything above a thousand, at present. Would you care——"

"No," smiled Mrs. Halstead, shaking her head.

Had Wide and Terry followed "Mr. Furnald," they would have discovered that he went straight to the railway station.

There he met Bob for a chuckling two minutes of conversation.

"Are they biting hard, old fellow?" asked Bob.

"As hard as you like," laughed his joking cousin. "I went up to a thousand for their old cow pasture, and they scouted me."

"Say," laughed Bob, "what do you think of that!"

"My train will be here in three minutes," laughed his cousin. "I shall now vanish. Later on, when the bottom falls out of the 'struck-oil' boom, the Halsteads will be looking for me hard, ready to sell at any price from a hundred up."

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled Fullerton, enjoying himself hugely. "Well, good-bye, Will. Thank you ever so much for helping us out."

"Say, Bob," suggested Will Fullerton, suddenly, "suppose some of those oil-crazy farmers up at Mayville should buy Mrs. Halstead's cow-pasture for several thousand?"

"They won't," said Bob, shaking his head. "There won't be any more signs of oil there. You don't know the Halsteads as well as I do. They wouldn't look at a fifty-thousand dollar offer just now, and before their heads come down the boom will be busted flat."

"Well, good-bye," said Will, as the train's whistle sounded. "You can call on me again, my boy, for anything as good as this. I've enjoyed myself hugely. Keep me posted on how it comes out, won't you?"

"Sure," promised Bob.

That young jobster chuckled inwardly all the way on his ride up to the fire-house. There he got Gerald Keating aside, and both young worthies enjoyed their hearty laugh over the coming taking-down of the Halsteads.

Something happened, however, to make Wide and his mother a little less exultant over their supposed good luck.

Terry heard that a scientist well versed in the ways of oil wells was at one of the hotels.

That scientist Terry hunted up and interested, then brought him around in the evening to see Wide and his mother.

The scientific gentleman listened attentively to the description of how the oil had been found on the water.

Then he shook his head.

"I have studied the formation of the rocks and soil all the way through this State," he said. "The formation up around Mayville, indeed, in that whole county, is not of the kind that has ever been known to yield a gush of oil."

"Then how did the oil come to be on the water?" asked Wide.

"I can't tell you," replied the caller, looking puzzled. "It may be due to some accident or other. Even if the oil came there naturally, you may be very sure that there isn't much more behind it."

"You could tell by going up there and looking the place over, couldn't you?" asked Mrs. Halstead.

"Yes, although I can tell you pretty nearly as well without going up there at all. I don't believe, madam, that you have any oil well on your property."

"What would you charge to go up there?" asked Mrs. Halstead.

"Why, my fee would be one hundred dollars."

Mrs. Halstead looked thoughtful.

"My candid advice, madam, is not to engage me on that business. My belief is that all you will get for your hundred dollars will be to have your curiosity satisfied."

This looked like honest advice. Wide, his mother and Terry began to see less of visions of wealth.

"I hope I am in error; yet I am very sure that I can't be," was the scientist's parting word as he went away. "If a paying yield of oil is struck anywhere in Mayville, I shall be much more surprised than you can possibly be, madam."

"Our dream of wealth is tumbling, Dick," smiled his mother, after the caller had gone.

"It has had a hard, crashing fall," laughed Wide.

"Do you believe that our caller is right?"

"He must be, mother, for he's an expert in his line. He'd like to earn a fee from us, and from the farmers in Mayville, too, if he thought he could earn the money honestly."

"Then, if Mr. Furnald should come to see me again——"

"I'm inclined to think, mother, that you'll do very well to nail his offer and ask him to show the money."

Mrs. Halstead thought it all over for two or three hours after she turned in that night. Then, at last, she got asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLAZING FINGER OF DEATH.

"Wide and his mother have struck it rich!"

That news traveled rapidly around Belmont the next forenoon.

Our hero paid less heed to it than anyone else.

To those who asked him he replied frankly that he be-

lieved the supposed luck would turn out to be only a "fluke."

"You won't get Wide excited, or off his head, if he does strike a pile," Joe remarked, admiringly, to Hal.

Our hero was at school, as usual.

Bob Fullerton, too, was in school, as was Gerald Keating.

That pair, in their glee, had hard work to keep from letting the cat out of the bag.

They kept the secret, however.

A few men from Belmont who had money to invest in anything "likely," took forenoon trains to Mayville to look into the reported "boom."

Rourke still hoped something good would come out of it, though he shared our hero's doubts.

On the street, that afternoon, the pair had to answer a good many questions, nor could our hero dodge good wishes and congratulations.

"Anyone who believes in our luck more than we do," laughed Young Wide Awake, "can buy that Mayville cow-pasture at a fair speculative figure."

"You wouldn't sell it for assessed valuation, though, would you?" pressed some eager questioners.

"Not by a long sight," was Wide's emphatic reply.

"'Twill be fine, av it does tur-rn out a good thing," murmured Terry.

"Provided my mother doesn't sell the land before we find out," whispered Wide. "To tell you the truth, Terry, after her talk with your scientific gentleman last night, she isn't eager to part with a hundred to have the scientist look at the place, and I don't believe she'll decline any reasonable offer for the land."

"Av it's good, thin, Oi hope she don't get the chanst to sell," grunted Terry.

Phil and Brad, with Anita and Maud Denton, whizzed by in the Duroc auto.

"Here's hoping you'll soon have one of these of your own, Wide!" Phil called out, gaily.

"Small danger, I guess," laughed Wide, to his chum.

Then his mind was taken off of everything speculative by the sight of Kitty's trim foot reaching down from the step of a carriage that had drawn up at the curb.

He and Terry hastened forward to greet their sweethearts.

"We've a few minutes to spare," announced Miss Kitty.

"We're driving to the station to meet papa and Mr. Vane, and find that we started a trifle early."

There was something in the merry twinkle of her eyes which suggested that she and Faith very likely had made an early start on purpose.

"Miss Duroc and her cousin, and two of our lads just went by in an auto," Wide observed.

"And likely t' pay a fine or two, av they keep up at the rate they were thraveling," hinted Terry.

The girls were looking their most charming in new, fetching Fall costumes. Wide, who had thought a few weeks before that Kitty looked her loveliest in fleecy Summer attire, now wondered, as he looked her over slyly and approvingly, if there could really be any season of the year at which she looked better than at another.

She was an inch taller than when he had first known her, fuller and rounder, and altogether a treat even to Wide's

eyes, accustomed though he was to seeing her nearly every day of his life.

Faith Vane, too, had greatly improved in point of beauty during the last few months, a fact which Terry now noted as though for the first time.

"Put that watch of yours away, won't you, please, Kit?" Wide asked, smilingly. "You keep glancing at it as if in a hurry to get away, and every moment I expect to see your horses start."

"We haven't very long to remain," sighed Kitty. "But a minute or two is better than nothing, isn't it?"

"A whole lot better," Wide agreed, promptly.

"If you two want to see us longer than a minute or two," suggested Faith, slyly, "there's one way to make sure of it."

"Yes?" asked Terry.

"You know the way to where we are to be found."

"Av we don't, 'tis not for want av thraveling the road," laughed Terry.

"Faith has given you the hint," smiled Miss Kitty, looking smilingly, half-coaxingly, into her lover's eyes.

"To-night, then?" queried Young Wide Awake.

"Not later than to-night," Kitty answered.

"Doesn't your father ever get tired of seeing us call at the house?" asked Halstead.

"If he does he never says anything about it."

"Your father must be a secretive man, then," laughed Wide.

"Not very."

"Kit, dear, the young rascal is fishing for a compliment," teased Faith. "They want you to repeat some of the nice things Mr. Lester has said about them."

"Then Mr. Lester has done us that honor?" laughed Wide.

"If he has," retorted Miss Kitty, "you sha'n't hear a word of what he has said. Not here on the street, anyway. That must all be reserved for you when you call."

"May we come rather early, then, to-night?" laughed Wide.

"We are certain to be through dinner by seven-thirty," proclaimed Faith Vane.

Yells from down the street attracted their attention.

"Gracious!" gasped Kitty. "That man has no right to be driving an automobile."

"He's drunk—he must be," cried Wide, watching the antics of a man all alone in a touring car, who was driving an auto up the street at rather fast speed.

He was handling the steering wheel so that the car wobbled all over the street.

A crowd of citizens, and a policeman on foot, had started to pursue the reckless driver.

"Stop him!" yelled someone.

The auto car came within an inch of smashing the Lester carriage.

Then the driver of the car, with a drunken leer on his face, veered across the street.

Crash! Whirr-rr! Bump!

Then a frenzied shout went up from the onlookers, for the reckless one had collided with a telephone pole.

The man himself was hurled out, falling a dozen feet away, while the car promptly turned turtle. In a second the car was in flames.

To add to the excitement another car came swiftly around the corner.

Ere the driver of this second car could turn out, he had collided glancingly with the overturned car.

Something going wrong with the steering gear, this second car skidded to the sidewalk, overturned and burst in flames.

The man driving this second car was hurled out and lay still in the street.

But from under the burning second car, from out of the blazing flames, came the shriek of a woman.

"Terry, old man, come on!" shouted Wide, almost in a frenzy himself as he leaped across the street, bent on rescuing the woman from being burned alive, even at the risk of his own life.

CHAPTER X.

BOB LANDS BIG GAME.

"Ring the house alarm, Hal!" shouted Terry, catching sight of Lieutenant Norton just as he darted after Wide.

Hal sped for all he was worth, for there was danger that the second overturned auto, which lay close to a wooden building, would set fire to that structure.

As Wide reached the imperiled woman, while the gasoline flames leaped up, he heard her terrified screams.

One of her arms reached out frantically.

This was all that could be seen of her body.

"Has the fire reached you yet?" panted Wide.

"Not yet. But I am in pain, and the flames are so near that their heat——" screamed the woman, then broke shudderingly down.

Wide leaped in as close as he could get to the car.

He took hold of one edge of the tonneau, while the gasoline flames licked out threateningly at his feet.

"Come on, Terry! Never mind the fire," called Wide.

The two together exerted all their strength to lift one side of the overturned car enough to enable the woman to crawl out.

But their strength proved unequal to the task.

"Here, you men, forward! Don't mind a little thing like a burn!" quavered the young fire captain.

Several of the men in the crowd sprang forward, then dodged back from the flames.

"Come on! There's a woman's life at stake!" challenged Wide.

"Av ye dassent get in," growled Terry without meaning to be funny at such a time, "thin lind us some av yure muscle, annyway!"

"Here's a crowbar!" called a porter, running up the sidewalk.

He got in close with Terry and Wide, and between them they prodded the bar under the car.

"Now, then, all together!" panted Young Wide Awake.

The heavy weight yielded somewhat under their combined efforts.

Then another man plucked up the courage to leap in and add a hand.

Now that side of the car was raised some foot and a half at least.

The flames, however, licked further out.

Terry stood staunchly at his post, not minding a few small burns that assailed his legs.

"Can you hold it, so, without my help?" demanded Young Wide Awake. "If so, I'll try to get in under the car."

Still another man came forward, adding his weight and muscle.

As for the rest of the near-by onlookers, they seemed to feel that there were now enough hands at the long crowbar.

Wide was down on his hands and knees, close to the car and peering under, yet trying to keep his face away from the flames.

"Can you get out, madam?" he called.

"No!" she shrieked. "Save me!"

"Are you pinned?"

"I—I think not. But I can't move my right leg."

At that Young Wide Awake hesitated no longer.

He moved swiftly, not minding minor burns that assailed him, until he could get a good grip on the woman's body.

As he took hold of her she shrieked again.

"Don't mind if I hurt. It's your life I'm saving," he called to her.

He had a few burns on his arms by this time. His face felt blistered.

But he held to the woman, dragging her out despite her shrieks of anguish.

"Hurroo!" yelled Terry.

For Wide was out from under the car, and was lifting the woman.

As he raised her, her clothing proved to be afire.

"Jump wid her—thin stop!" yelled Terry.

Wide darted swiftly away with the woman, going more than a dozen feet ere he stopped.

Then he bent, put her down and began to beat out the flames where they smouldered or flared in her clothing.

Terry Rourke had followed at a bounding leap and was now doing as much for the smoking clothing of his chum.

So absorbed had both been that neither had noted the sounding of the house call on the fire-alarm system.

But now Washington 1, two-thirds manned, came up on the jump.

There were quickly hands enough to do everything.

The wooden building had already caught fire, but the stream quickly stopped that, and also put out the blazing cars.

In the meantime a physician had ascertained that the woman's right leg had been broken in the overturning.

She had been slightly pinned, too, by that leg, until the lifting of one side of the car had released her.

As for the drunken fellow, who had caused all the trouble, he had escaped with bruises, and the shock had done much to sober him.

But the young woman's cousin, her companion, who had been pitched from the second car, was now picked up—dead.

Not until the excitement had quieted did Wide and Terry discover that they had received small and now smarting burns about the arms.

Wide, in addition, had one tiny but painful burn on his face.

The drunken cause of the trouble was taken away by the

police, the young woman was taken away in an express wagon, and the authorities took charge of the dead body of her companion.

Glancing across the street the chums saw the white faces of Kitty and Faith.

Yet both reached out a hand to their respective sweet-hearts.

"Dick," throbbed Kitty, "I was very proud of you!"

"I wonder if your father will say as much for you?" laughed Young Wide Awake.

Kitty, with a gasp of recollection, drew out her tiny watch.

"Dick, that train must have been in five minutes. Thank you for reminding me."

The Lester carriage went rapidly down the street, while Joe coaxed Wide and Terry up to the drug store for a look at their burns.

These burns smarted somewhat, but were in no sense crippling.

Joe applied soothing washes, and then declared:

"There, you two are ready for the next fire, or anything else that comes along."

"D'yez think Oi could fight?" whispered Terry, grimly, so that Wide did not overhear him.

"I'd hate to have to stand in front of you," laughed Joe.

"Come on wid me, thin, till I shake Wide, somehow. There may be something doing."

"Good enough," chuckled Joe. "I'll help you lose Wide."

Slyly enough word was passed around.

Two or three of the fellows very reluctantly undertook to keep our hero's attention while Terry and some of the others got away.

"Where's Terry?" asked Wide, after a while, as a little group of the Washingtons stood at a street corner.

"Dunno," responded Brad. "Down at the engine-house, I guess."

A stroll down there, however, resulted in finding no Rourke.

For that matter, the fire-house had been deserted until the arrival of Wide's little party.

Terry, in the meantime, had slipped away with Hal, Joe and a few other fellows, while another group of a dozen proceeded separately to the same place.

Vengeful Terry had discovered that Captain Fred, generally accompanied by three or four Neptunes, often strolled down Ellis Street, half-way downtown, along the middle of the afternoon.

Terry's party reached a vacant lot along that route.

Here the late grass was tall. Several of the Washingtons hid themselves, while Terry and Joe squatted near the street.

That other crowd of a dozen reached the lot from the rear, also hiding themselves.

Then followed a long wait, but at last Captain Fred Parsons, accompanied by Larry Downes, Brick Houston, Bob and Keating, hove in sight.

Fred espied Terry and Joe, and knew them to be "bad medicine," but he felt safe that his own escort offered abundant protection, so he kept on until he reached the Washington pair, who looked up at the Neptunes curiously.

"Say, don't you fellows know," rasped Fred, "that there

have been a good many complaints about tramps sleeping on this field?"

"Pass on, thin," grinned Terry. "There do be as good places lower down."

"Say, I don't want any of your guff," retorted Parsons.

"What wud yez do av ye got more?" demanded Terry, leaping to his feet.

Joe got up, too, though slowly, as though there were no need for haste.

"What would I do?" repeated Fred. "I'd——"

He stopped short, his jaw dropping in consternation.

For now the hidden Washingtons were beginning to show themselves.

They had spread out, too, in a way that cut off the escape of any of the Neptunes.

"What does this all mean?" demanded Fred, nervously, and angrily, too. "What is this all—an ambush?"

"Oi dunno what ye'd call it," jeered Terry. "Oi know on'y wan thing thot's likely to happen, ye thafe!"

"What's that?" demanded Fred, angrily.

"A thafe," insisted Rourke, coolly, but with a wicked gleam in his eyes. "It's the same name thot Oi called yez the other night. Oi'm here to back it up, ye thafe, blaggard, scoundhrel, sneak, liar—but Oi'm running out av breath and out av names, too, and Oi haven't said the half thot Oi think av yez! 'Tis a fight Oi'm afther, ye omadhaun, and 'tis a fight the like av which ye niver r-ran up against before, ye lying thafe. 'Tis a fight, likewise, thot ye can't be dodging."

"See here," broke in Larry, coldly, "what's the occasion of all this?"

"As a question thot comes from a fairly dacint man, Oi'll answer it," rejoined Rourke. "'Tis for a cowardly thrick yure captain did the other night. He's had many a thry to lick Wide, and always has yure captain taken second honors in anny such meeting. So he thried to do up Wide be the on'y way thot he could do it. The other night he sneaked up behind Wide, sthruck him down from behind, tied his hands, and beat him insinsible."

"That's a lie!" cried Fred, though his face went white.

"Thot remark is wan thot ye'll have the chanst to back up widout delay," said Terry, drily. "Now, thin, into the field wid yez!"

"I won't!" flared Fred. "I won't take any orders from a fellow like you."

"Bedad, thin, ye will!" roared Terry.

He and Hal seized the fellow on either side, wheeled him about and rushed him into the field, pitching him to the ground.

In the excitement, Keating tried to make a dash away, evidently for the purpose of sending the alarm to the Neptune fire-house, but Joe and Phil pounced upon him, treating him in the same fashion that Captain Fred had just been handled.

The other Neptunes came along sensibly, seeing that there was no other choice about it.

"Now, get up, Par-rsons, and sthrip to condition," commanded Terry, tossing off his coat. "Be quick about it, too."

"I won't fight you," snarled Fred. "This is an ambush—mighty near to an assassination."

"Faith," snapped Terry, "afther what ye did, ye sneak,

Oi'm thinking ye can have it as near to an assassination as ye want. Get up and fight me, or stand for having the whole gang jump ye and give ye worrse than ye gave Wide. What'll it be—stand up and face me, or stay where ye ar-re and take it from all av us?"

Cursing, Parsons got upon his feet.

"I'm glad I've got witnesses enough to prove that this is no fair fight," he said, in a parched voice.

"'Tis punishment, more than fight, we're afther," Terry admitted. "But av ye'll face me, and take it all from me, thin ye'll have only wan inimy to face instead av a dozen."

Fred sullenly prepared himself for the encounter.

"Is this to be a fair fight?" he demanded, suspiciously.

"Av ye'll stand up to me, ye'll have on'y me to handle, av thot's what ye mean. Av ye can thump me, thin 'tis all well for yez, for the gang won't handle me own throubles. But av Oi get the best av it, and ye think Oi'll stop whin ye cry 'enough,' thin ye've got some more guessing to do. Par-rsons, ye unspeakable blaggard, av Oi get the bist av this, thin, in remimbrance av Wide, Oi'll go as far as Oi like wid yez! Now, put up yure hands, for the band's going t' play."

Parsons knew that he was "in for it."

All the savagery in his nature came to the top, for he felt like a cornered rat.

He was even aware that he did not come in very largely for the sympathy of his own comrades, and that knowledge gave him a desperate courage in addition.

Yet, withal, he was nearly cool, for he knew that any misstep in the encounter would be taken instant advantage of by Rourke.

So, for nearly a full minute the two hard fighters exchanged blows, or parried them, without any advantage on either side.

Then Terry emitted a snort.

Captain Fred knew that meant mischief of some sort, and it worried him.

Three neat feints came from the Irish lad, but Parsons parried them all. Then—swat!

It was a fearful left-hander that closed one of Fred's eyes tight.

He bellowed with the shock of it, but kept on fighting.

He was gone, though, when a skin-breaking jab landed under his other eye.

Now he fought like a blinded bull, barely able to see Rourke, who danced around him tantalizingly, working in some fearful blows.

Fred lunged for a knockout blow that should end it all, but vengeful Terry was not dealing in knock-outs.

All over the face of his opponent the Irish lad's fist played; then up and down Parsons's rib cage.

Prods over the kidneys, swats on the back of the head, lower-rib blows, jolts in the neck—Terry was administering all the different kinds of blows he could think of with the skill and patience of an artist in that line.

Once Parsons tried dropping to his knees, but Terry biffed him one smartly across the chin, gruffly ordering him to his feet.

Then Fred realized, with sickening fear, that this fight must go on until he dropped from sheer exhaustion.

The on-looking Neptunes, powerless to interfere or to

get away, gasped as they realized the fulness of the punishment that Terry was administering.

Finally, Parsons, though he fought on, dispiritedly, began to cry.

"Baby!" taunted Rourke. "Somewan run afther his bottle av milk."

But Parsons could not stop crying, though he began to swear, too, as he blindly tried to defend himself.

He was growing weaker and dizzier, but Rourke would not even administer what would have been the merciful knock-out blow.

Only when Terry saw that his man could barely stand did he pause, while Fred, realizing a halt, let his arms drop weakly to his side.

"Ye thafe," demanded Terry, "d'yez admit, now, what ye did to Wide?"

Parsons did not answer.

"Spake!" roared Terry. "Or, be the powers, Oi'll keep yez going another ten minutes yet."

"I—I did what you say," stammered Captain Fred, weakly.

"Ye admit it?"

"Y-y-yes."

"Thin ye lied whin ye said ye didn't?"

"Yes."

"Ye're a liar, thin?"

"Y-y-y-yes."

"And a thafe?"

"Yes."

"A sneak?"

"Yes."

"A blaggard and a scoundhrel?"

"Yes, oh, yes!"

"Ye're nothing thot it's fit for a dacint human being to associate wid, Par-rsons?"

"Y-y-y—no!"

"And iverywan prisint who hears yez believes yez," said Terry, grimly. "Ye've the wor-rst misfit av a soul, Par-rsons, av annywan thot iver lived in the United States. Ye're a disgrace to the flag thot has to shelter yez, and likewise to the counthry thot yure ancestors came fróm. Now, get off the field, or Oi'll forget how weak ye ar-re, and be kicking yez off."

Brick Houston picked up the coat and other belongings of the sadly battered captain of the Neptunes, while Bob and Larry, neither of them wasting any sympathy on their captain, led him away.

"Did Oi do too much to him, fellers?" asked Terry, looking around at the Washingtons.

"No!" declared Joe, promptly. "Not enough, if anything."

But it was to Hal, the quiet one, who spoke but little, that all looked for the final verdict.

"It was a just punishment for a dirty, scoundrelly act," spoke the young lieutenant of the Washingtons.

"Thin there'll be no need for Wide to be taking anny further notice of the matther," spoke our hero's mascot chum. "Maybe Oi butted in, but Oi had the feeling in me thot Oi wanted to take care av Par-rsons mesilf."

Slowly the young Washingtons strolled back to their own portion of the town.

For one thing, they didn't want to have the look of beat-

ing a hasty retreat in case a delegation from the Neptune fire-house took it into their heads to avenge their captain.

But no Neptunes appeared in pursuit.

Truth to tell, the Neptunes were beginning to be ashamed enough of their captain.

"I don't see," whispered Bob to Gerald Keating, "why the bad blood between the two companies can't be worked out in my way. You can bet, Gerald, that you and I through our little fake oil job, will cause Halstead more uneasiness than any three lickings could do."

"Oh, you're all right, Bob," declared Keating.

Young Fullerton swelled with pleasure.

Had that young jobster, however, been able to look in on his father at that moment, he would have felt less pleased with himself.

For Mr. Fullerton, senior, accompanied by a lawyer, had dropped in at the office of Mrs. Halstead.

"I almost hate to sell you the land, Mr. Fullerton," Mrs. Halstead was saying, "for, of course, it may turn out that this oil boom is nothing but a false alarm, a flash in the pan, so to speak."

"I understand the chances, madam," responded Bob's father. "I have been up to look at the property to-day, and, while the farmers thereabouts tell me that the water was not as oily to-day as it was yesterday, yet I believe there is a chance, a good chance, indeed, that the property will develop into something in the way of a good oil property. It is the chance that I am offering to buy, Mrs. Halstead. If it were a sure thing that the property was a valuable producer, then of course I would expect to pay several times as much as I have offered for your land."

"I have had a talk with a scientific man who rather scouts the notion that oil could flow through a soil and rock formation of the kind that is found at Mayville," continued Wide's mother.

"Scientific men are very excellent people, and often know a lot, yet they sometimes make big mistakes, like the rest of humanity," replied Mr. Fullerton. "Now, Mrs. Halstead, let me ask you again if you will accept the two thousand dollars that I offer you for a deed to your land?"

"Yes, Mr. Fullerton, if you agree that you understand that I know nothing as to the real value that the land may or may not have."

"I agree to all that," responded Bob's father, "and declare that I am buying the land purely as a speculative proposition."

"Then I accept your price, Mr. Fullerton."

"Very good; my lawyer has the deed with him, ready to be signed and witnessed."

Ten minutes later Mr. Fullerton left the typewriting office with a deed to Mrs. Halstead's Mayville land.

Wide's mother, on the other hand, sat looking at a neat little pile of bills that stood for two thousand dollars.

"I hope I've done the wisest thing for my boy," sighed the good woman, wistfully.

"Jones," said Mr. Fullerton to his lawyer, as the two stepped along the street, "I'm satisfied that I've done the best stroke of business to-day that I've done in years."

"I'm sure I hope so, sir," replied the lawyer, cautiously.

Young Wide Awake, in the meantime, wondering where all the fellows could be, when there were usually so many of

them on Main Street, was walking down again slowly toward the fire-house.

"Seen any of our Washingtons lately?" Wide asked, halting a small boy.

"Nope," replied that youngster, truthfully.

"Is your name Halstead?" called a much begoggled man, driving a touring car slowly in at the curb.

"Yes," our hero replied, presently.

"Then I hope you're the same Halstead that rescued Miss Swanson from under an overturned auto this afternoon."

"Yes," Wide nodded.

"Miss Swanson has been taken to the home of friends in the suburbs," continued the man in the car. "She is doing as well as can be expected, but still, she is in a pretty bad way. She is insisting that she must see you and thank you. She is very positive that she must see you. You'll humor a sick young woman that way, won't you?"

"Why, yes, of course," nodded Wide, pleasantly, "though I wish she'd leave out the thanks."

"Jump in, then, on the front seat with me, and I'll spin you out there quick, and bring you back again."

Young Wide Awake entered the auto, and started away, with never a suspicion but that all was as right as it looked.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN WITH A GRUDGE.

"I supposed the young lady would be taken to the hospital," Wide remarked to the man driving the car.

"They were taking her there," was the answer, "when our folks came along and insisted that she be taken to our place."

Then the man was silent, as though the running of his machine, which was going at a good clip, needed all his attention.

Wide looked the fellow over a bit curiously out of the corner of his eye.

Of the face or its expression our hero could make out but little, since the man's cap was pulled down well over his brow, while he wore one of the largest pair of auto goggles that our hero had ever seen.

There was something rather familiar about the fellow's general make-up.

Our hero felt that he had seen him before, though he could not place him.

"Who are your——" our hero began, but his companion cut him short with:

"If you don't mind, I won't talk much, for I'm watching my machine."

After that Wide remained silent, while the car sped on out of Belmont, and along a suburban road to the southward.

Some two miles beyond the city the car wheeled swiftly, running up a broad drive to a big, old-fashioned residence.

"Why, I thought this place was unoccupied," cried Wide.

"It was until a week ago. Our folks have taken it for the winter," explained the man, then bent over his machinery.

He stopped just before the door, saying:

"Jump out and I'll let you in."

Wide leaped out of the car, but exclaimed:

"Hold on, my friend. I don't know that I like the looks of things!"

"Doesn't make a blamed bit of difference whether you do or not," came the cheerful answer, as the fellow leaped at the young fire captain, grappling with him.

The door opened, three more rough-looking fellows piling down the steps.

Overpowered, Wide was lifted and borne up the steps with a rush, the door slamming behind him.

"Now, you can yell a little, if you want, or swear, just as pleases you most," proposed the fellow who seemed to be the leader of the gang.

"Oho! I know you well enough," uttered Wide.

"Yes; we've met before," came the grim response. "We were a little hurried, then, but we'll have time to make things more entertaining for you now."

"You're the fellows who tried to lift the cash out of the bank."

"Say it as loud as you want," grimaced the leader. "There's nobody else to hear you. We're going to reckon with you, too, young feller. Do you know how much you and your kids kept us from getting?"

"About eighty thousand, I believe."

"Have you any idea how we feel toward a meddler who stopped us from making that kind of a haul?" demanded the leader savagely.

They were in the hallway, into which none of the unshuttered windows looked.

"The police know you're still in this part of the country," bluffed Young Wide Awake. "In fact, they feel pretty sure about getting you all. Do you think it's going to be wise to add another crime to your list, to be paid for to the police who will have you before dark?"

"Oh, they'll have us before dark, will they?" sneered the leader.

"I believe so," returned Young Wide Awake, with all the coolness that he could throw into his voice.

"Why are you taking all this trouble to put us wise, then?"

"Because I suppose you intend to wreak some wicked kind of a vengeance on me."

"We do," came the prompt assurance.

"Then don't you see," smiled Wide, trying hard to appear at ease, "that anything you do to me will add to the penalties that you'll have to pay to the law?"

"You don't know who we are, I see," retorted the leader, with a hideous grin.

"No; I don't believe I do," Wide admitted, after looking thoughtfully at all four of the glowering rascals.

"If you did, you'd know that we don't stand much afraid of extra penalties. All four of us have records that will cost us our lives when the day comes that we meet our fate in court."

Young Wide Awake paled at the threat that these words carried.

If they spoke the truth, these men would not stop at murder, since they were already accused of other crimes of that kind.

"Well, you've got me," admitted Wide, with a sigh. "I can't stop you this time."

"Not as you did the other time," snarled the leader, adding a string of oaths. "But you'll never stop us, or any one again."

One of the rascals seized Wide by the shoulders from behind.

Another grabbed at the young fireman's hair, as though savagely bent on pulling out a handful of it.

"That's right, boys. Tune the meddler up a bit before we get down to real business with him," nodded the leader.

Flop! When they had tugged at his hair long enough to bring out the cold perspiration of acute suffering, one of the wretches tripped the young fireman, throwing him flat on his face.

"Twist his arms some," advised the leader, grimly. "That always makes a fellow tuneful."

For fully five minutes they held the young fireman to the floor, continuing the arm-twisting.

Though the torture broke no bones, the agony of it was fearful.

Then, for a few moments, they let him lie there, resting from his torment.

"They're thinking up the next devilish work, I suppose," Wide gritted, inwardly.

That arm-twisting had frightfully aggravated the smarting and pain from the burns on his arms.

And Wide was yet to know the pain of more burns, for, presently, stripping off his shoes and stockings, while two of the quartette sat on him, the leader of the safe-blowers amused himself by lighting matches and holding the flames near the soles of Wide's bare feet.

"Now, let him stand up," commanded the leader.

When our hero got to his feet, he found himself hobbling painfully, though this torment had not been made as severe as he had feared it would be.

"I s'pose by this time you're sorry, ain't you, that you ever laid eyes on our crowd?" demanded the leader.

"I can't honestly say that you're the best people I ever met," Young Wide Awake retorted, with a grimace.

He hoped that an appearance of true gameness would arouse their admiration enough to induce them to go more lightly on the torture.

"We can't stay here all day, you know," advised one of the quartette.

"That's right," nodded the leader. "Well, then, boys, since we've done enough to show our young guest how amusing we can be, I suppose we may as well get the rest of this business over with promptly now."

As he spoke he thrust one hand inside his vest.

He drew his hand out again, a steel blade flashing there.

"Sorry we can't let you take a look outdoors first," growled the leader, "for you've taken your last look at the world. Hold him there, Bill and Jem. It won't take me but a second!"

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

When Terry and his crowd came back they hunted for Wide, to tell him the news of the meeting with Parsons.

But our hero had just vanished from view in that touring car.

As the young Washingtons inquired for our hero, one small boy spoke up:

"Wide? He went off in an auto."

"Where?" demanded Terry.

"Why, I was talking with him, when a man came up in a big red car, and said that the young lady that was hurt in that auto accident wanted to see him."

"Did Wide go off wid him?" asked Rourke.

"Yes."

"Thin our lad is down at the hospital," nodded Terry.

"He'll be back soon."

"Hospital?" said the small boy. "Oh, no. He didn't go that way. That's the way he went," pointing.

"Then Wide didn't go to see the young lady," broke in Joe, "for I happen to know that's where she was taken. She's there now."

"Well, Wide went off with the man in that other direction. That's all I know," insisted the small boy. "And the man said he was going to take him to the young lady, who wanted to see him."

Hal and Joe looked puzzled, while into Rourke's eyes a sudden look of suspicion shot.

"Fellers," he muttered, "Oi'm wondhering av there's some game av plant in all this?"

"Who'd want to do anything to Wide?" queried Hal.

"Maybe the safe-blowers," replied Terry, looking worried.

"Terry, is Dick around here anywhere?" called Kitty Lester, as her father's machine drew up at the curb. "We've got the car out and are ready to take you both for a spin."

"Oh, Miss Kit!" cried Terry, then leaped up into the car and told her what was in his mind.

While he was still hurriedly talking, the handsome big Duroc car came from the opposite direction with Anita and Maud in it.

There was a hurried conference.

"It don't look good to me—not a bit av it!" rang Terry Rourke's voice, anxiously.

"You'd better take this car and give chase," cried Kitty, "if you can only find out which way they went."

"And this car, too," urged Anita, springing down to the ground. "Hurry, boys, do, for there may be really something wrong."

Then the young firemen piled into both cars, as many as could squeeze in, and a fast start was made in the direction that Wide's guide had taken.

"There's the very blamed car, now!" almost shouted Terry, as he caught sight of the red car standing before the door of the house into which our hero had been decoyed. "Stop here!"

He threw up a hand, a signal that halted the other car behind them.

Then, after piling out, the young firemen stole swiftly across the grounds.

It was Terry, alone, who mounted the front steps, listening at the closed door.

He was just in time to hear an ugly voice on the other side of the barrier speaking our hero's doom.

"Hold on, there!" roared Rourke, lustily. "Stop in the name av the law. Forward, men!"

Terry's arms waved frantically, bringing the waiting, breathless Washingtons up the steps with a heavy rush of feet.

"The door!" yelled Terry, at the top of his voice. "Down wid it!"

Well accustomed to breaking down doors in their career of fire fighting, these young Washingtons hurled themselves

at the door with a concerted, powerful rush that carried the barrier before them.

As they burst in, Wide was found on the floor, where he had just been hurled, while the sound of fast retreating feet could be heard beyond in the building.

"Don't try to go after them, fellows," begged Wide. "Some of you are sure to be killed if you do. Those fellows are crazily desperate."

"Did they bur-rt ye, lad?" demanded Terry, bending over the young fire captain.

"Not much," Wide declared.

"Thin let the scoundhrels go, fellers," directed Terry. "May they r-run str-raight into the arrums av waiting cops!"

Though the safe-blowers got away, they did so on foot, not deeming it wise to risk a rush to the front of the house, where their own red car lay.

Wide's injuries were examined. There was nothing to show, beyond a few tiny burns on the soles of his feet.

Most tenderly Terry and Hal replaced Wide's shoes and stockings, then helped him out to the car.

Brad Thompson and one of the other fellows took the front seat of the abandoned red car, and ran it back.

In Belmont the red car was run to a garage, and Police Chief Sharp notified.

The car was never claimed, for the safe-blowers, attempting another job that same night, in a near-by city, had the bad luck to be captured in the act.

On the history of their past crimes the leader and one of his pals met the demands of the law with their lives, while the other two were sent up for twenty years each.

Four very joyous young ladies who had loaned their cars for the pursuit met the triumphant young Washingtons on their return.

Wide was taken straight to his home, Terry, Kitty and Faith riding along with him.

"Now, I suppose we sha'n't see you this evening?" Kitty murmured.

"You will, unless something worse happens to me in the meantime," rejoined Wide, hobbling a little as Terry aided him down to the ground at his own gate.

Fred Parsons lay at home, his face in bandages, his soul in a revolt of hate, for he could not bring himself to see that he owed all his misfortunes to himself.

Fred's father heard the story of his son's Waterloo in grim silence.

The banker could not bring himself to blame the Washingtons, or to attempt revenge, for Mr. Parsons felt that he owed too much to our hero and his friends for the saving of the bank's funds.

"This young cub son of mine never will learn anything," sighed the banker. "He hasn't told me the truth about the fight, or the causes that led up to it, but I can hardly doubt that Fred deserved about all he got at Rourke's hands."

"Robert, I want to speak with you a few moments," said Mr. Fullerton, that evening, after dinner. "Come in the library, please."

"It doesn't look like anything unpleasant coming," murmured Bob to himself, as he followed his parent. "The gu'nor looks rather unusually pleasant."

"Robert," continued his father, glowingly, when both were seated, "I have a little surprise for you. It has always

struck me that your mother and I ought to leave about all of our money to your sisters. Girls are likely to have a harder time in the world, you know, than boys. Still, I have always wanted to do something for you. To-day I made what I think is going to be a very lucky stroke for you. For two thousand dollars I've bought Mrs. Halstead's land at Mayville——"

"What!" gasped the thunderstruck Bob.

"Yes, I know that's a low price," his father continued, smilingly. "Still, I put the deal through. Now, I'm going to regard that piece of land as your start in life. I think it will net you a nice little fortune. That valuable piece of land is to be your share from your mother and me."

"That Mayville cow-pasture for mine?" thought Bob, cold and sick. "Whew! But I'll do fine with that for my share of the family fortune. By hard work I may raise potatoes enough to keep me alive! Oh, me! Oh, my! Thunder! And Wide's mother has got two thousand more to leave him! Wow! Is there any such thing as a square deal on earth?"

Then the wholly miserable youngster tried to thank his father, inwardly praying that it would never leak out how he and Keating had "salted" that brook freely with crude oil.

That job-gone-wrong never did leak out, although, of course, the Mayville oil boom soon collapsed.

Wide managed to keep his calling appointment at the Lester house that evening and got along quite well, too.

"It makes me shudder, Dick, dear, every time I look at you," murmured Miss Kitty, pathetically. "You are in fearful danger in the fire department, and you have met with such dreadful adventures besides!"

"Oh, I'll come through all right, to the very last," laughed Wide, comfortably.

"You seem very certain about that," said Kitty, anxiously.

"Seem certain? I am certain!" retorted Wide, glancing across the room at Terry Rourke. "Any fellow ought to feel all right that can brag of having a mascot for a chum!"

THE END.

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CHOICE READING MATTER.

A tramp has beaten all known records by swimming twenty-seven miles in thirty minutes. He did not mean to do it. He merely tried to steal a ride from St. Louis to Chicago on the rear of a locomotive tender. When the train started he fell over backward, through the open manhole, into the water tank. The noise of the train drowned his cries for help, and he was obliged to swim until the first stop was reached, at Alton. When taken out he was nearly dead, but the engineer was so unfeeling as to call his attention to the fact that the water was only four feet deep, and he might have stood up. The conductor, also unfeeling, asked him for his ticket, but the tramp said he had not come by rail, but by water.

Cedar suitable for use in the manufacture of lead pencils is yearly becoming more scarce and expensive. Germany alone exports 15,166 tons to foreign countries every year, or about 3,033,200,000 pencils. The difficulty and expense of procuring suitable wood led to careful investigation for a substitute, and for some time a German company has been making pencils the core of which is encased in a composition whose principal ingredient is potatoes. It is said these pencils are a trifle heavier than those made of cedar, but they are easier to sharpen, and the available supply of potatoes is practically inexhaustible. A pencil of the best quality costs the manufacturers only \$0.00928, while one of second quality can be marketed for about half that figure. The possible yearly output is estimated at 14,000,000 pencils.

The ancient town of Damascus is now coming into line with modern progress, and not long ago inaugurated a system of electric lighting and tramways which is well laid out. As to the tramway lines which are now in operation, they are running within the city as well as to connect with the two suburban localities of Meidan and Salahujeh. It is expected that owing to the success which the tramways are meeting with since they have been opened up, they will be increased in the near future. The city is now lighted by 1,000 arc lamps and a considerable number of incandescent lamps. The electric lighting on the outside of the principal mosque is quite striking when the lamps are illuminated for certain special occasions. A large Turkish company known as the Ottoman Tramway Company is operating the traction lines. With it is connected the Brussels Local Railway Company. Current for the different circuits is obtained from a hydraulic plant which is erected at twenty-five miles distance from the city at El Tequieh, and the Barada falls are utilized to obtain the power which is needed. From the same point the city water supply is taken. In the turbine station erected not long since there are now installed about 1,000-horsepower in turbines. To these are connected the dynamos, which are operated on the three-phase system, using transformers to raise

the voltage for the power line going to the city. In town is erected a substation which receives the power line and has a number of motor-dynamo groups for lowering the tension so as to supply the lighting and mains and the tramway feeders. A Berlin company installed the electric outfit in this case. Damascus is the first city in Turkey which has such an extensive light and tramway system.

An industrious robin has built a nest on the tongue of a big carryall used by Lon Fuson, driver of the Center township consolidated school wagon, in hauling about forty children to and from the Center township school, south of Muncie, Ind. In this nest, which is near the front axle, the robin laid her eggs and raised her brood. So much confidence has she in Mr. Fuson that sometimes she does not accompany her young on their twice-a-day tours, but allows them to go away and return while she industriously grubs about for worms. When Fuson noticed the bird building her nest on the wagon in the early spring, he thought she would soon realize the uncertain character of her surroundings and desist, but she failed to do so, and patiently continued the work of construction until the nest was completed. Then she laid the eggs and sat on them, hatching four young robins. The latter do not seem to mind being jolted and bumped over the uneven highways, but this process seems to give them an abnormal appetite on their return home.

RIB TICKLERS.

"So poor Bill's gone, has he? How did he die?"

"Three tons of cement fell on his chest."

"Poor feller! He was always weak there."

"These ladies are all eligible."

"I hardly think I can go amiss."

"Then, how about a nice, affectionate widder?"

"So you quit smoking because she asked you to?" said the youth with the clamshell cap.

"Yes," answered the lad with the turned up trousers.

"And then?"

"Then she went walking with a man who smoked a pipe, because she said it kept away mosquitoes."

Pa—Thomas, I'm disgusted at this report of your teacher's. Why don't you ever know your lessons?

Tommy—They're too hard.

Pa—Nonsense! They're not too hard for Johnny Jones, are they?

Tommy—Aw, that's different. Johnny has got a smart father, an' he inherits his brains.

A certain childless woman moved to the suburbs and devoted herself to the raising of poultry. A witty friend went out to spend the day, and was shown a fine lot of young chickens.

"These," said the mistress of the place (a la Cornelia)—
"These are my jewels."

"And I suppose some day you'll have them set," responded the visitor quickly.

"Pop."

"Yes, my son."

"Can't greyhounds get over the ground pretty lively?"

"Yes, my boy."

"All of 'em, pop?"

"Well, all but ocean greyhounds, yes."

"Which do you prefer," said the artistic young woman, "music or poetry?"

"Poetry," answered Miss Cayenne. "You can keep poetry shut up in a book. You don't have to listen to it unless you choose."

Sam Gruesome's Money

By John Sherman.

A warm May day was drawing to a close over the village of Tuxedo, the sun declining behind the mountains, gilding the limpid streams, and a soft, fragrant breeze rustling the green foliage of bushes and trees.

There was a dusty road leading past Sam Gruesome's old, dilapidated mill, and a boy was coming from the direction of a tavern, further down the road, between which and the village the old mill stood.

He was about sixteen years of age, not very tall, and as strong-looking as most boys are at his time of life. He wore a middling decent suit, a straw hat, was barefooted, and in his hand he carried a bottle of gin.

As he neared the mill, whistling a lively tune, he saw a flock of crows fly across his path, and halted.

"Gosh! That's a sign of bad luck, or my name ain't Joe Ashton!" he exclaimed, eyeing the sable birds distrustfully.

He was generally a luckless chap, so took every omen as a prediction of ill-fortune, ever since he could remember. That period dated from the time old Sally Grubbs, the boarding-house keeper, took him from the county poorhouse when he was a little fellow in short dresses and curls.

The widow was a hard task-mistress, generally getting the worth of his keep out of his hide by overworking him. She usually got her supply of gin for personal consumption from the Half-way House, and it was to replenish her bottle Joe had been sent there that evening.

The boy had scarcely come to the conclusion that Sally was going to give him an unusually hard beating that night, when he was startled by hearing a loud yell emanate from the old mill, and then a voice cried:

"Murder! Murder! Murder!"

"It is Sam Gruesome!" gasped Joe, turning pale, and feeling undecided whether to run or stand still. Instead of doing either, he suddenly plucked up courage and made tracks for the mill, muttering, as he hurried on:

"I can't do much, but if any one's killing old Sam I may be able to see who it is, and give the alarm. That's the worst of being rich and miserly like him. It makes burglars' fingers itch to get hold of one's gold, and I wouldn't be surprised if that's just what's happening!"

He reached the mill a moment later, and glanced into the yard through the picket fence. There he saw one of Sally Grubbs' boarders from the city standing by the well beside the door, lowering the bucket and peering down with a scowl on his face.

He was the French dandy in the stove-pipe hat and long frock coat, fierce mustache and bristly imperial. A swarthy-faced individual was monsieur, and very sinister of countenance; but he sported fine clothes, a profusion of jewelry, and was very polite withal.

The widow called him Jules Renard.

"He has killed old Gruesome," muttered Joe. "I'm sure he has, and now he has just buried the body down in the well. I always was a-scared of that fellow, somehow, and now I know why. He is a murdering thief, sure!"

The boy shivered with horror.

"I won't run away, though," thought he, "for he may see me and give chase. The best way is to see what he is going to do next. Then I'll get a chance to get off and spread the news, so the constables can catch him."

Arrived at this conclusion, Joe was just ensconcing himself behind a bush, when a hand came down rather rudely on the back of his neck, and a voice hissed in his ear in pretty savage tones:

"You sneaking little spy! I've got you!"

"Oh, let me go!" gasped the boy.

He wriggled around, glanced at his captor, and a look of the most intense terror overspread his face. The man who held him was Dick Grubbs, the son of the widow, and had escaped from the village prison a few days previously, having been sentenced to confinement there for a term of five years

several months before for having nearly killed a man at the Half-way House in a drunken brawl.

"He is a pardner of monsieur's," thought Joe, with a convulsive shiver. "That settles my case. They'll hack me to pieces now, and that'll be the end of me!"

"What are you doing here?" demanded Dick, angrily.

"Nuthin'," replied Joe. "Let me go, will you?"

"You are watching us," retorted Dick. "I saw you. I don't know how much you witnessed, but I can tell you, my lad, that you will have a hard job to get away and blow on us at the village, now that I've got you."

And so saying he dragged the scared boy out from behind the bush, and shouted to the other:

"Hello, monsieur! I've caught a spy!"

"Ma foi!" cried the Frenchman, looking up with a start.

"Vat eez zees—von spies, by gar?"

"Yes—mother's bound boy!"

Monsieur let go of the well-rope.

"Breeng ze young fellair here, Deek," said he.

The young reprobate, who was no more than thirty, dragged Joe into the yard toward the other. As Joe drew near the well he heard a deep, dismal groan come up from its depths, and he shivered with dread as visions of the mangled body of old Sam Gruesome came up before his terrified mind.

The two men whispered together a moment, so that Joe could not hear what they said, then they went inside the mill, dragging the boy with them.

"I'll lock him up in the cellar," said Dick, when they were inside of the gloomy old structure. "He will be safe enough there till we finish our work, for once we get hold of Gruesome's money-box we can leave this place, and the mill-hands will find and release him in the morning, when they come back to work."

"Ver' goot," assented monsieur. "An' vile you poot heem een ze cellair, me I occupy zat I look for ze box, sair."

"Good enough," replied Dick, as monsieur lit a candle, stuck it in the neck of a bottle, and stood it on the planking of the window in back of the mill-wheel. "You know where to look, I suppose?"

"Sacre! vot you sink I come to zees town—for nosing, eh? Oh, no! I question ze mill-hand, an' I fine out many seeng zat I know ver' soon ees to ze advantage, vizout zat he discovair vot I up to am."

"And you are sure you can find it?" eagerly queried Dick. "You intimated as much. Remember, we must go to-night, for it is suspected that you were the one who aided my escape from the jail, monsieur."

"An' ze suspicion ees not wrong," chuckled the other.

"No. But, as we have got to fly, I'd hate to go without Gruesome's money, since we have gone so far, and the old rascal is almost dead."

"'Ave not ze fear zat I not geet eet."

"And lose no time," admonished Dick. "The sooner we are off, the better. We want no interruption from any one who may chance to stray in here."

Monsieur shrugged his shoulders again. Then he ignited another candle, and handed it to Dick.

"Teck zees an' go," said he. "I do ze rest."

"The villains!" thought Joe. "Frenchy must have been an old friend of Dick's; then he is a crook, too, for Dick only travels with bad people. He's come up to the widow's just to help Dick to escape from jail, that's what he did, and Dick's been hiding ever since. Then the polite monsieur has been suspected, he knows it, and is going to travel before they prove him guilty."

"So they must have made up this plan to kill poor old Gruesome, get his money, and fly. That's the worst of not putting your money in a bank. Gruesome always was known to be afraid to trust his gold in banks, and everybody knew very well he kept his money hidden in this old mill. If he'd been sensible, and not so afraid of losing his gold, these rascals wouldn't get it. But now it's brought him to his grave in the bottom of the well, done him no good, and they'll rob him of it, anyway. Dear me—I wish I was safe home."

Dick had taken the candle and interrupted Joe's cogitations by grasping him by the shoulder.

"You come with me, young one!" said he, sternly, as he glowered at the boy from under his soft felt hat and dragged him across the room. There were grist-stones, beams and trash strewn all around, and the boy stumbled over them as he was hurried toward a door beside a half-curtained window.

The window communicated with a room into which Dick dragged the boy, and opened a trap-door in the floor that led down into the cellar. They descended. The boy remonstrated, but Dick struck him a savage blow, knocking him down on the floor of the cellar, and the bottle of gin fell from his hand and rolled away.

"Hello! what is this?" queried Dick, picking it up.

"A bottle of gin your mother sent for at the tavern," said the boy, scrambling to his feet and staring around.

Dick's eyes sparkled. He had been imbibing whisky that night, and, being an insatiate drinker, he was glad to get the gin.

"So the old woman sent for this, eh?" he asked, as he pulled out the cork, and, holding the bottle up to the light of the candle, glanced at its contents. "She never stints herself—just like her son, for all the world. I'm sorry—she will be disappointed about this."

"Oh!" cried Joe, in alarm. "You ain't going to drink it?"

"Well, I just guess I am, now!"

"But she will beat me if you do."

"I don't care a rap. Tell her I drank it, and she will forgive you!" coarsely laughed Dick, as he raised the bottle to his bloated lips, and took a draught.

Joe glanced around the cellar again. A thrill of horror pervaded him, as he noticed that it was infested with an army of rats. Their shrill squeaks could be heard, as they scampered about, and he could see their sharp little eyes twinkling like sparks in the obscurity surrounding him.

"If he leaves me here," thought the boy, "those ravenous beasts may devour me alive!"

In back of Dick stood a row of grain-bins, with the lids up, and he leaned against one of them, set the candle on the floor, and took another pull at the bottle of gin with evident relish.

"Fine brand, this," said he smacking his lips. "Old Tom."

Joe glanced at the stairs and was debating in his mind what chance he would have to escape by a sudden dash, when he observed that Dick was rapidly emptying the bottle of gin.

"If he gets drunk, I'll get away anyhow," thought Joe.

"Now, see here, you!" exclaimed Dick, in thickening tones.

"I want to know whether you didn't see us tackle old Gruesome and then put him down the well when you peeped through the fence?"

"I didn't see anything," said Joe.

"Get out! You can't stuff me that way."

"I didn't," asseverated Joe. "I only heard him yell 'murder!'"

"Oh, you—hic—did, eh?" said he, with a hiccough.

The boy noticed that his eyes were rolling by this time, and his legs were growing unsteady beneath him.

"He is as full as a goat, now," thought Joe.

Then a rather daring plan suggested itself to him.

"Maybe I can save old Gruesome's life," he thought. "I heard him groaning, so he can't be dead yet. If he stays there, though, he will surely die. Anyhow, I'll try it."

Approaching Dick, he gave him a push.

"Blast you!" growled he, "what did you do that for?"

But before the sentence was finished he tumbled over backward into the grain-bin, and Joe glanced in. He tried to get up, grew dazed, fell back, raised the bottle he still clutched to his lips, took a long pull at it, and commenced to roar a maudlin song.

Joe knew that Dick was helpless, and, gaining courage, he slammed down the lid of the bin and bolted it. Dick was made a helpless prisoner.

"I've got him safe now!" muttered the delighted boy.

Then Joe seized the candle, and softly went upstairs. He saw monsieur going around with a lit candle, and then glided through the door, out into the yard. Darkness had fallen by this time. The boy soon discovered the well, however. Pulling at the bucket-rope, he found that it had an immense weight at the other end.

"Old Gruesome must be fastened to the bucket!" he thought. "I wonder if I can hoist him up?"

He tried, and, to his joy, succeeded. In a few minutes he raised the miller to the surface, and found old Gruesome soaking wet from his immersion in the cold water below. He was conscious and able to converse, too. Joe saw that he had been fastened to the bucket with a rope, and that he was bound hand and foot.

"Scoundrels!" groaned he, on reaching the open air. "Let me go! Already you have half-killed me!"

"Oh! he yet lives!" muttered Joe.

Seizing the old man, he dragged him out to the ground.

"Jerusalem!" he exclaimed, when his glance fell upon Joe.

"I swear, if young Ashton ain't one of them!"

"No, no!" interposed the boy.

Then Joe explained all that happened.

"Release me then!" said the miller, "and perhaps I may be able to save my money from those rascals."

Joe drew out his penknife, and cut old Gruesome's bonds. The miller arose to his feet.

"How did they get the best of you?" queried Joe.

"I was closing up for the night, when they both tackled me in the yard. I yelled 'murder!' And then I got a crack on the head that stretched me senseless," the miller replied. "Did you see them do it?"

"No. But I heard you cry. What shall we do now, Mr. Gruesome?"

"Do! Why tackle 'em, of course."

"Well, I've already made a prisoner of Dick."

"Then I'll capture the other one."

"How can it be done?"

"I'll exchange clothing with Grubbs. The Frenchman will not know I escaped from the well. That will give me a chance to get near enough to him to get my hands on him before he can escape."

The exchange of clothing was soon made, Dick remaining unconscious of the fact; and, locking him in the bin again, they crept upstairs. When they reached the room adjoining that in which the Frenchman was, they paused. The Frenchman was back in an obscure corner when the miller went in, the candle still in the window, and Gruesome saw him lift a box from under a board in the floor and lay it down.

The Frenchman had succeeded in finding the money-chest. An expression of intense joy was depicted upon his swarthy face; but, hearing the miller's footstep, he sprang up and glanced at him.

Upon seeing who confronted him, the Frenchman uttered a startled cry and recoiled. A demoniacal expression was upon his face, as he suddenly flashed a silver-plated revolver from his pocket, cocked it, and pointed it at Gruesome's head. The terrified miller clenched with the Frenchman. They struggled around the room a moment, but monsieur was the most powerful of the two, and in a twinkling he threw Gruesome on the floor. Striking his head upon a piece of rusty iron, the poor miller became utterly unconscious. Joe had witnessed all that passed. Gliding into the mill-room, he seized the revolver, which the Frenchman had dropped. Monsieur turned around with a startled exclamation.

"By gar, ze pistol eez loaded! Drop eet or——"

"Oh, no! Now you march on ahead of me out to the road, or I will pull the trigger. Do you hear?"

There was no help for it, so monsieur reluctantly obeyed. Joe marched him to the village, and handed him over. After he was put in jail, Joe and a constable returned to the mill, and found that Gruesome had recovered, had hidden his money again, and had bound Dick Grubbs hand and foot. The drunken rascal had been dragged out of the bin, up from the cellar, and, fully alive to his situation, was reviling the delighted miller. The constable took him away to the prison, too.

The two reprobates were sentenced. Sally Grubbs died.

Joe remained with the miller, and Gruesome proved a kind benefactor to the poor boy. In the end he made Joe his heir, and when he died, the mill and all his gold went to the boy.

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